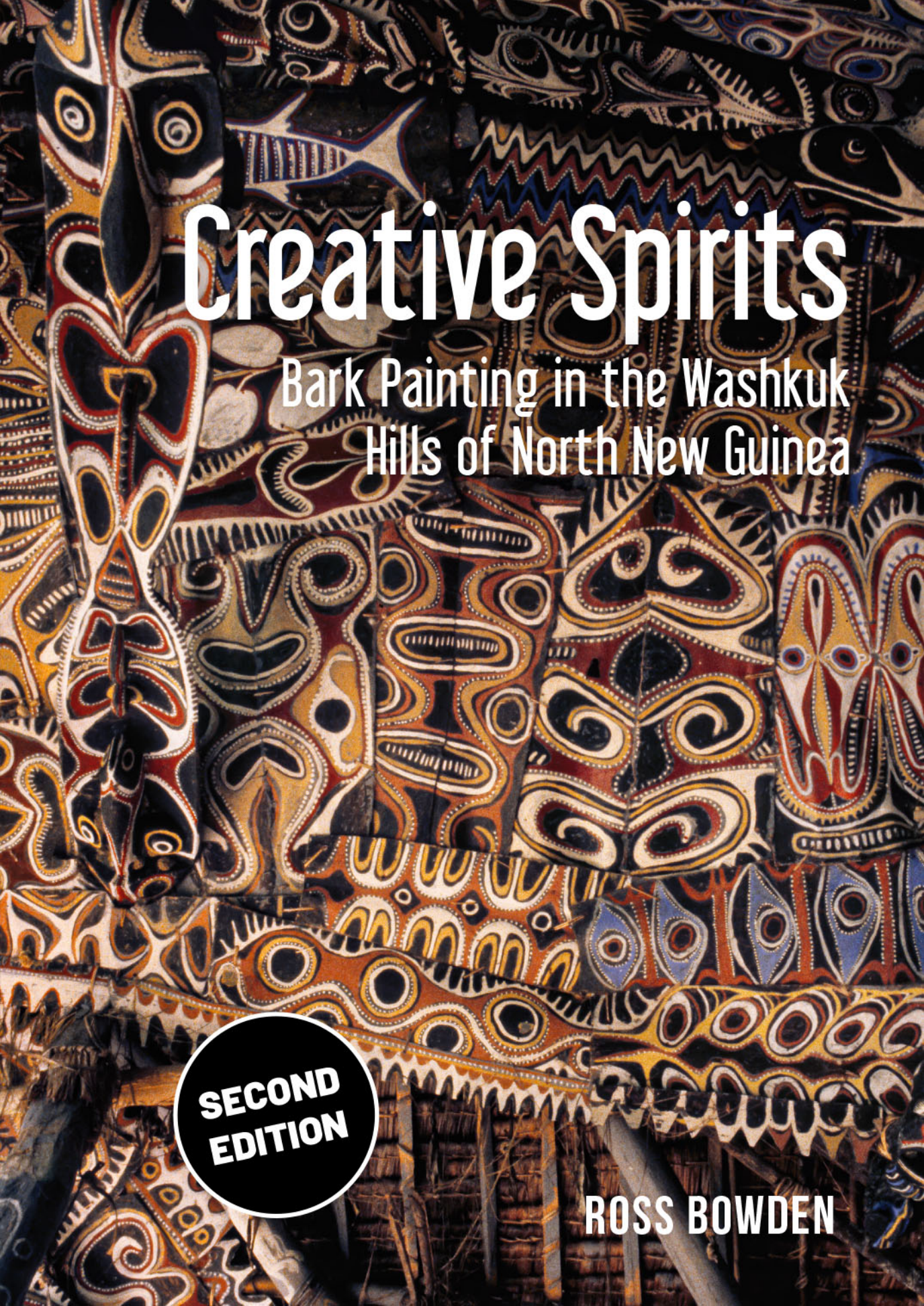
Creative Spirits
Bark Painting in the Washkuk Hills of North New Guinea
SECOND EDITION
ROSS BOWDEN

Creative Spirits

sidestonepress

Creative Spirits

Bark Painting in the Washkuk Hills of North New Guinea

ROSS BOWDEN

© 2025 Bowden

This book is published under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). This license does not apply to content that is attributed to sources other than the copyright holder mentioned above. Under this license you are free to share this work, provided the makers are attributed. Its content cannot be used for commercial purposes nor is it allowed to make adaptations without permission from the copyright holder.

For more information about our licenses, please visit https://www.sidestone.com/publishing/creative-commons.

Published by Sidestone Press, Leiden
www.sidestone.com
E-mail: info @ sidestone.nl
Phone: (+31)(0)71-7370131

Lay-out & cover design: Sidestone Press
Photograph cover: Bark paintings on the ceiling of Nggeyasatuk men's house, Bangwis village, 1987.

ISBN 978-94-6426-391-6 (softcover)
ISBN 978-94-6426-392-3 (hardcover)
ISBN 978-94-6426-393-0 (PDF e-book)

DOI: 10.59641/h8k4e5f6g7

Contents

Acknowledgements	**7**
Note on the text	**9**
List of Figures	**11**
1. Sepik painting	**23**
2. Images of Identity	**37**
3. The Technology of Painting	**51**
4. The Elements of Design	**65**
5. The Kwoma Style	**73**
6. Shared Images. Shared Meanings?	**91**
7. Aesthetic Values and Artistic Creativity	**103**
8. Learning to Paint	**119**
9. Recent Developments	**125**
10. Six Painters & Their Paintings on Bark	**139**
11. Kwoma Paintings on Paper	**227**
References	**277**
Index	**285**

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the technical staff of La Trobe University, Melbourne (Australia), and in particular Russell Bader, for assistance with photographing the bark paintings illustrated in Chapter 10; to Les Walkling, photographer and teacher of photography at RMIT University in Melbourne for editing the images in Chapter 10; to the National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne, Australia) for permission to reproduce its photographs of the works on paper illustrated in Chapter 11; to the Museum of World Cultures, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, for permission to publish the Iatmul skull rack shown in Figures 9.13 and 9.14; and to the late Mrs J.H.L. McGuigan of Melbourne (Australia) for permission to reproduce the photograph in Figure 2.12. I thank Jennifer Collins for her detailed editorial advice and the linguist Dr. Bernhard Schebeck for translating many of the German texts cited.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the artists whose work it illustrates, and in particular to Wachongg of Bangwis village (see Figure 10.14). Painter, sculptor and songman, Wachongg was my major Kwoma research assistant and a valued friend.

Note on the text

In this book all italicised Kwoma and other vernacular words are spelt according to the orthography used in my dictionary of Kwoma (Bowden 1997). This orthography was devised for Kwoma by the missionary linguists Orneal and Martha Kooyers (Kooyers 1974; Kooyers, Kooyers and Bee 1971). I adopted it on the recommendation of the late Donald Laycock, in his day the doyen of Sepik linguists. In this orthography the italicised letters '*b*', '*d*', '*g*' and '*j*' stand for prenasalised phonemes and are equivalent in sound to 'mb', 'nd', 'ngg' and 'nj', respectively. Thus, the Kwoma term for bark painting, *bi*, is pronounced 'mbi'. The letters 'ii' correspond to the schwa and are pronounced like the 'e' in 'enough'.

With the one exception noted below, vernacular proper names are spelt without italics. The phonemes that would be represented *in italics* by the letters '*b*', '*d*', '*g*' and '*j*' are therefore replaced with 'mb', 'nd', 'ngg' and 'nj' respectively. The only exception is where proper names form part of vernacular phrases, where they are italicised. Tok Pisin (New Guinea Pidgin English) words are also italicised. Their spelling follows that of Mihalic's dictionary (Mihalic 1971). To distinguish them from other italicised words Tok Pisin expressions are identified explicitly in the text, in places by the abbreviation 'TP'.

Some vernacular proper names have acquired established spellings in the ethnographic literature. To avoid confusion I follow the established spellings. Village names are a case in point. The spelling of village names follows that of Laycock's *Sepik languages: checklist and preliminary classification* (Laycock 1973), by far the most comprehensive guide to village names and the language groups to which the villages belong.

Note on the second edition

This second edition of *Creative spirits* includes a new final chapter (Chapter 11). This documents 33 previously unpublished Kwoma paintings on paper, the majority of which are by artists whose barks are illustrated earlier in the book. All 33 works on paper, along with 42 of the barks illustrated, now form part of the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (Australia).

Photographs

Unless otherwise indicated the photographs are by the author and are dated.

List of Figures

Figure 1.1. Right side of the interior of Nggeyasatuk men's house viewed from the front, Bangwis village, 1987.

Figure 1.2. The canoe-landing at Washkuk village on the northern edge of Napu Lagoon, 1988.

Figure 1.3. Map of Ambunti area.

Figure 1.4. Nggeyasatuk men's house, Bangwis, 1988.

Figure 1.5. Ceiling paintings at the rear of Nggeyasatuk men's house, 1987.

Figure 1.6. Wayipanal men's house, Bangwis village, 1978.

Figure 1.7. The interior of Wayipanal men's house viewed from the front, 1982.

Figure 1.8. Men sitting at the front of Wayipanal men's house participating in a village meeting, 1982.

Figure 1.9. Wachongg of Nggiley clan (centre) with one of his young sons in Wayipanal men's house entertaining Adam Koney, a visitor from Brugnowi, a Iatmul-speaking village on the Sepik (see Map), 1978.

Figure 2.1. View of the left side of the interior of Wayipanal men's house showing ceiling paintings and carvings decorating the main posts and beams, 1982.

Figure 2.2. The right side of the interior of Wayipanal men's house viewed from the front left corner, 1987.

Figure 2.3. Bark paintings on the right side of the ceiling, rear half of Wayipanal men's house, 1978.

Figure 2.4. Bark painting of a flying fox (*apokibi*), Wayipanal men's house (front left corner). Painting made *c*1968. Photo 1972.

Figure 2.5. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a butterfly (*aposiibiiruka*), Tek totem, 110 × 70 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.

Figure 2.6. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of an edible fern (*noku woji*ya), Tek totem, 132 × 67, 1988.

Figure 2.7. Yatiikapa of Bangwis village holding a specimen of the type of edible fern termed *noku wojiya* depicted in the painting in Figure 2.6, 1987.

Figure 2.8. Meyimbor, Hipo clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of the fruit of a *yobo bodi* tree, Hamikwa totem, 100 × 60 cm, 1988.

Figure 2.9. Fruit and leaves of one of the several varieties of *bodi* tree, Bangwis village, 1978.
Figure 2.10. Mburunggay of Amachey Keyava clan, Melawei village, standing beside six paintings he produced for the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery, 1982.
Figure 2.11. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a woman's stomach scar (*mokwoy*), not totemic, 115.5 × 79.7 cm, 1978. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.394.
Figure 2.12. Three young Kwoma adults in 1930. Photo courtesy Mrs J.H.L. McGuigan of Melbourne (Australia).
Figure 2.13. Ceremonial clay food bowl (*awomar*) made *c*1900 by Meer'ow of Nggiley clan, Honggwama tribe, (H) 26.1 x (W) 24.6cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.439.
Figure 2.14. Ceremonial clay food bowl (*awomar*) made c.1950 by Manal Kapay of Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis village, (H) 24 x (W) 16.2 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.440.
Figure 3.1. Ceiling paintings, front right corner of Nggeyasatuk men's house, Bangwis village, 1987.
Figure 3.2. Naniyas of Awonow clan, Bangwis, holding a green leafstalk cut from a sago palm he has just felled, 1982
Figure 3.3. Naniyas of Awonow clan, Bangwis, holding a thinned sheet of bark cut from a dry sago-palm leafstalk showing the smooth side on which artists paint, 1982.
Figure 3.4. Tuwundimi of Nowil clan and his young son Willy Apen pulverising the fibrous core of a sago palm preparatory to leaching the edible starch out of the pith, 1973.
Figure 3.5. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis, using an adze to thin a flattened sheet of sago-palm leafstalk, 1982.
Figure 3.6. Wachongg trimming the end of a 'double' bark before using it for a painting, 1982.
Figure 3.7. Wachongg stitching two 'single' barks together to make a 'double' bark, 1982.
Figure 3.8. Detail of the back of a 'double' bark.
Figure 3.9. The artist Wachongg applying the black clay undercoat to a bark, 1982.
Figure 3.10. Wachongg working on his painting of a monitor lizard, 1982.
Figure 3.11. Wachongg's initial outline in white paint of a totemic monitor lizard (*gey*), 1982.
Figure 3.12. An early stage in Wachongg's painting of a *gey* lizard, 1982.
Figure 3.13. Later stage in Wachongg's painting of a *gey* lizard, 1982.
Figure 3.14. Detail of Wachongg's representation a *gey* lizard showing changes made halfway through the painting to the upper half of the design, 1982.
Figure 3.15. Wachongg standing beside his completed painting of a *gey* lizard (centre) and two other barks, 1982.
Figure 4.1. Bark paintings in Wayipanal men's house, front right side of ceiling, 1973.
Figure 4.2. Common design elements used in Kwoma paintings.
Figure 4.3. Complex motif composed of a wavy line, pointed oval and arc.
Figure 4.4. Complex motif composed of a pointed oval and arcs.

Figure 4.5. Horizontal band composed by replicating the motif illustrated in Figure 4.4.
Figure 4.6. Manal Kapay of Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis, holding his painting of boulders in the northern half of the Washkuk Hills, 115 × 70 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.
Figure 4.7. An early stage of Manal Kapay's painting of a sago grub (*ow*).
Figure 4.8. Manal Kapay's completed painting of a sago grub (*ow*) of the *ow kiitiikiit* variety, 120 × 45 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.
Figure 5.1. Bark paintings at the front of Minjawolar men's house, Bangwis village, 1987.
Figure 5.2. Ceiling paintings in Wayipanal men's house, rear left corner, 1978.
Figure 5.3. Manal Kapay of Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of water-worn river stones, 119.5 × 62.9 cm, 1982. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.411.
Figure 5.4. Yatiikapa of Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a 'spirit' python (*hopoma*) named Gawukumbu owned by the Tek totemic division, 120.5 × 69.2 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.428.
Figure 5.5. Meyimbor, Hipo clan, Bangwis, holding his bark painting of a winged stinging insect of the type named *wakatowa sama*, Tek totem, 110 × 70 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.
Figure 5.6. Manal Kapay of Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Bark painting depicting the leaves of the *kurij boga* plant, a type of wild taro with large heart-shaped green leaves, 100 × 65 cm (approx.), *c*1967. Photographed in situ in Wayipanal men's house, rear left side of ceiling, 1978.
Figure 5.7. Wulasaka of Nowil clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a flying fox of the *gaba-rugween* variety, Tek totem, 130 × 60 cm (approx.), *c*1967. Photographed in situ in Wayipanal men's house, rear left side of ceiling, 1978.
Figure 5.8. Mirror reflection across lines A and B.
Figure 5.9. Wulasaka, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a *wakan* plant of the *hoponokor* variety, Tek totem, 120 × 70 cm (approx.), *c*1967. Photographed in situ in Wayipanal men's house, front left side of ceiling, 1978.
Figure 5.10. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village, holding an example of the *wakan* plant depicted in the bark painting in Figure 5.9, 1982.
Figure 5.11. Meander line bisected by axis of glide reflection symmetry A.
Figure 5.12. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a pumpkin plant, not totemic, 115 × 70 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.
Figure 5.13. An elkhorn fern (*yibiika*) growing on a post outside the painter Manal Kapay's house, Bangwis, 1982.
Figure 6.1. Bark paintings on the right side of the ceiling in Wayipanal men's house, 1978.
Figure 6.2. Meyimbor of Hipo clan, Bangwis, holding his bark painting of a flying fox (*apokibi*) of the type named *kwonoma*, Hamikwa totem, 110 × 80 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.

Figure 6.3. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a flying fox (*apokibi*), Keyava totem, 120 × 80 cm (approx.), 1972.
Figure 6.4. Mburunggay, Amachey clan, Melawei village. Bark painting of a flying fox (*apokibi*), Keyava totem, 110 × 65 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.
Figure 6.5. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis, with his bark painting of a shooting star (*maway*), 105 × 50 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.
Figure 6.6. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a shooting star (*maway*), 106.4 × 68.7 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.423.
Figure 6.7. Wakarap, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a tree frog (*giirisa*), Tek totem, 110 × 70 cm (approx.), *c*1967. Photographed in situ in Wayipanal men's house, rear left corner of ceiling, 1978.
Figure 6.8. Ambunyiki of Nowil clan, Bangwis, holding his bark painting of a shooting star (*maway*), not totemic, 130 × 95 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.
Figure 6.9. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a shooting star (*maway*), 132 × 78 cm, 1988.
Figure 6.10. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a shooting star (*maway*), 133 × 40 cm, 1988.
Figure 6.11. Wulasaka, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a forest spirit (*nokuy-agaba*), Wayipanal men's house, right side of ceiling, 90 × 60 cm (approx.), *c*1967. Photo 1988.
Figure 6.12. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a forest spirit (*nokuyagaba*), 115.4 × 66.9 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.414.
Figure 6.13. Wulasaka of Nowil clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of river waves (*uku ichu*), not totemic, 110 × 67 cm (approx.), *c*1967. Photographed in situ in Wayipanal men's house, rear left side of ceiling, 1978.
Figure 7.1. The front of Wayipanal men's house, Bangwis village, 1982. The men are participating in a village meeting.
Figure 7.2. The fan vault or 'wasp's nest' decorated with bark paintings at the front of Wayipanal men's house, Bangwis village, 1972.
Figure 7.3. Bark painting depicting a flying fox (*apokibi*), Wayipanal men's house, rear right side, 1978.
Figure 7.4. The same painting as the one illustrated in Figure 7.3 in 1988, twenty years after it was first put on display.
Figure 7.5. Sculpture at the front of Wayipanal men's house depicting the culture hero Moyichey, 1987.
Figure 7.6. The interior of Wayipanal men's house viewed from the rear left corner, 1987.
Figure 7.7. Yatiikapa *of* Yanggaraka clan holding two of his 'single' barks, 1988.
Figure 8.1. Yatiikapa of Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of an unnamed spirit (*aroko*) in the form of a water insect termed *arokojawiyogo*, Hamikwa totem, 139 × 76.5 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.420.

Figure 8.2. The Bangwis village master artist Yatiikapa (right) giving Pandiiriikumb of Nggiley clan a lesson in painting on bark, 1988.
Figure 8.3. Pandiiriikumb standing beside five bark paintings he produced for sale, 1988 (see also Figures 8.4-8.8).
Figure 8.4. Pandiiriikumb of Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a flying fox (*apokibi*), Keyava totem, 135 × 65 cm (approx.), 1988.
Figure 8.5. Pandiiriikumb of Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of waterlily flowers (*ukuba she*), Keyava totem, 135 × 65 cm (approx.), 1988.
Figure 8.6. Pandiiriikumb of Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of an *apojin* bird, Kowariyasi tribe totem, 141 × 70 cm, 1988.
Figure 8.7. Pandiiriikumb of Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a design commonly found on gourd lime containers in Iatmul-speaking villages on the Sepik River, not totemic, 135 × 65 cm (approx.), 1988.
Figure 8.8. Detail of bark painting shown in Figure 8.7.
Figure 9.1. Mburunggay, Amachey clan, Melawei village. Bark painting of a flying fox (*apokibi*), Keyava totem, 97.7 × 67.6 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.429.
Figure 9.2. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of fruit of the *mima bodi* tree, Tek totem, 110 × 70 cm (approx.). Made *c*1967. Photographed in situ in Wayipanal men's house, rear left corner, 1978.
Figure 9.3. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis village, with his depiction of two Yena ceremonial sculptures, 110 × 70 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.
Figure 9.4. Yena ceremonial sculpture named Sasap owned by Hipo clan, Bangwis. Carved in the 1920s; height 123.4 x width 26.2 x depth 13.5 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, cat. 2001.433.
Figure 9.5. Yena ceremonial sculpture named Wanggiiriimu Kiipiika carved by Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis, in 1973; height 192.2 x width 31.6 x depth 24.9. National Gallery of Victoria, cat. 2001.435.
Figure 9.6. *Arokomaka* double-face design carved on an eaves beam, Nggeyasatuk men's house, Bangwis village. Sculpture made *c*1978. Photo 1982.
Figure 9.7. *Arokomaka* double-face design carved on an eaves beam, Wayipanal men's house, Bangwis village. Sculpture made *c*1967. Photo 1988.
Figure 9.8. Meyimbor, Hipo clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a steer, not totemic, 116 × 65 cm, 1988.
Figure 9.9. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis, with his bark painting of a monitor lizard (*gey*) of the *nawuriiman* variety shown climbing a tree, 125 × 85 cm (approx.). 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.
Figure 9.10. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis, showing the front of a carving he made *c*1960 decorated with a stylised face in low relief, 1982.
Figure 9.11. Rear side of the sculpture illustrated in Figure 9.10 decorated with a low-relief carving of a *nawuriiman* lizard climbing a tree, 1982.
Figure 9.12. Meyimbor, Hipo clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of the mythical woman named Tumbishikay owned by the Hamikwa totemic division, 106.7 × 67.7 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.403.

Figure 9.13. Iatmul skull rack with sexually explicit representation of a woman in the centre (see also Figure 9.14). Collected in 1961 by Eike Haberland at Torembi village, length *c*264 cm. Museum of World Cultures, Frankfurt am Main, cat. NS 46478.
Figure 9.14. Detail of skull rack shown in Figure 9.13.
Figure 9.15. Part of a mural painted in the 1960s on the western wall of the Ambunti Post Office. Photo 1972.
Figure 9.16. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Bark painting based on a carved *me niik* double-face design, not totemic, 114.9 × 69.9 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.427.
Figure 10.1. Yatiikapa of Bangwis village sitting under his house working on one of the paintings illustrated in Figure 10.10, 1988.
Figure 10.2. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Flying fox (*apokibi*), Keyava totem, 107.5 × 68.6 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2002.389.
Figure 10.3. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Flying fox (*apokibi*), Keyava totem, 137 × 64 cm, 1973. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.393.
Figure 10.4. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Green parrot (*apojin*), Kowariyasi tribe totem, 143.2 × 70.8 cm, 1973. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.390.
Figure 10.5. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Black millipede (*magiyakow*), Tek totem, 120.6 × 85.8 cm, 1978. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.422.
Figure 10.6. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. *Arokomaka* double-face design, not totemic, 116 × 71.9 cm, 1978. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.426.
Figure 10.7. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. *Bodi* tree fruit, Tek totem, 110.5 × 75 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.392.
Figure 10.8. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. (Left) Snail (*wawiyam*), Wanyi totem, 130 × 49/34 cm, 1988. (Right) Waterlily flowers (*ukuba she*), Keyava totem, 125 × 50 cm, 1988.
Figure 10.9. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Scorpion (*mediigiiriigiirii*), Tek totem, 115.6 × 6.5 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.421.
Figure 10.10. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. (Left) Larva of *me poko ow* insect, Tek totem, 116 × 38/29 cm, 1988. (Right) Butterfly (*aposiibiiruka*), Tek totem, 120 × 47/30 cm, 1988.
Figure 10.11. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Painting based on a design the artist saw on a lime container while visiting a Iatmul-speaking village on the Sepik; not totemic, 109.8 × 73 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.424.
Figure 10.12. Incised design on the upper half of a lime gourd, Iatmul language group. Gourd 9 cm wide (approx.). Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, cat. 35.94. Drawing by the author, 1983.
Figure 10.13. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Spirit in the form of a *hopoma* python named Nggawukumbu owned by the Tek totemic division,

120.5 × 69.2 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.428.
Figure 10.14. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis village, wearing one form of traditional men's headgear, and a mother-of-pearl neck pendant, 1982.
Figure 10.15. Wachongg, Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Large boulders on an area of land owned by the artist's clan in the northern half of the Washkuk Hills, 120 × 70 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.
Figure 10.16. Wachongg, Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Butterfly (*aposiibiiruka*), Tek totem, 138.8 × 69.3 cm, 1973. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.388.
Figure 10.17. Wachongg, Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Black millipede (*magiyakow*), Tek totem, 127.8 × 83.5 cm, 1978. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.391.
Figure 10.18. Wachongg, Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Leaf-eating insect (*mebiika sama*), Tek totem, 126 × 70 cm, 1988.
Figure 10.19. Wachongg, Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Sago-palm insect (*ow sama*), Tek totem, 123.3 × 69 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.413.
Figure 10.20. Wachongg, Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Water beetle (*uku'ayep*), Tek totem, 128.4 × 76.5 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.415.
Figure 10.21. Wachongg, Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Shooting star (*maway*), not totemic, 125.1 × 69.7 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.418.
Figure 10.22. Wachongg, Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Double-face design (*me maka*), not totemic, 115.7 × 64.1 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.419.
Figure 10.23. The Bangwis village painter Manal Kapay working on a 'double' bark depicting a totemic insect (see also Figures 4.7 and 4.8), 1982.
Figure 10.24. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Boulder inhabited by a forest spirit named Mbutakom; both the boulder and the spirit are owned by the artist's clan, 124 × 63.4 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.406.
Figure 10.25. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. *Apoleyar* bird, Tek totem, 125.2 × 71.8 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.407.
Figure 10.26. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Leaf-eating caterpillar (*yopomeshe hoposhopo*), Tek totem, 131.1 × 66.9 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.408.
Figure 10.27. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Fruit of the *mima bodi* tree, Tek totem, 121.6 × 60.3 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.409.
Figure 10.28. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Waves (*ukuboro*), not totemic; 133.1 × 71.4 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.412.
Figure 10.29. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Sago-stealing spirit (*nokuy-agaba*), not totemic, 115.4 × 66.9 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.414.

Figure 10.30. The painter Ambunyiki decorated for a performance of the Yena ceremony held at Bangwis village in December 1973.
Figure 10.31. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Flying fox (*apokwashi*), Wurambanj totem, 134 × 70 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001. 395.
Figure 10.32. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Waves (*uku ver ver*), not totemic, 137 × 66.9 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.396.
Figure 10.33. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Edible insect larva termed *me poko ow*, Tek totem, 137.5 × 73.5 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.397.
Figure 10.34. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Butterfly (*aposiibiiruka*), Tek totem, 133.4 × 66.2 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.398.
Figure 10.35. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Butterfly cocoon (*aposiibiiruka bey*), Tek totem, 135.2 × 63.7 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.399.
Figure 10.36. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. *Arokomaka* double-face design, not totemic, 136.4 × 64.5 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.400.
Figure 10.37. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Centipede (*medii*), Tek totem, 137.7 × 69.6 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.402.
Figure 10.38. Meyimbor of Hipo clan, Bangwis village, holding a pre-contact, but newly repainted, ceramic sculpture of a type displayed during the Yena ceremony, one of three rites associated with the harvesting of yams. Photo 1982.
Figure 10.39. Meyimbor, Hipo clan, Bangwis. Taro plant (*boga*), Hamikwa totem, 104 × 70.9 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.404. Melbourne.
Figure 10.40. Meyimbor, Hipo clan, Bangwis. Waterlily plant (*ukuba*), Hamikwa totem, 107.9 × 81.5 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 200.405.
Figure 10.41. The painter Mburunggay of Melawei village decorated for a performance of the Minja ceremony held at Bangwis village in December 1973.
Figure 10.42. Mburunggay, Amachey clan, Melawei. 'Spirit' crocodile named Mowonjiya owned by the Keyava totemic division, 154.4 × 44 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.430.
Figure 10.43. Mburunggay, Amachey clan, Melawei. Flying fox (*siivagakibi*), Tek totem, 127.5 × 69.1 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.431.
Figure 10.44. Mburunggay, Amachey clan, Melawei. A group of underworld spirits in human form collectively named Takwarumb owned by the Keyava totemic division, 106.6 × 64.5 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.432.
Figure 11.1. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village, working on a painting in acrylics on canvas, 1973. An unfinished bark painting can be seen in the background.

Figure 11.2. Nayikiya of Bangwis village attending a death payment, 1982.
Figure 11.3. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. An *arokomaka* spirit, 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.6 × 58.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.484.
Figure 11.4. Detail of the painting in Figure 11.3.
Figure 11.5. The faces of unnamed *arokomaka* spirits on two slit-gongs in Wayipanal men's house. Figures carved *c*1965. Photo 1987.
Figure 11.6. Face of an *arokomaka* spirit on the finial of a slit-gong in Wayipanal men's house. Figure carved *c*1940. Photo 1987.
Figure 11.7. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. An *arokomaka* spirit, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101.0 × 72.0 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat 2001.496.
Figure 11.8. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. *Maway* (shooting star), 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.7 × 58.6 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.483.
Figure 11.9. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. Mythical male figure named Masembeyakapa, 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.7 × 58.6 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.486.
Figure 11.10. Marak of Washkuk village leading men in a dance named Kwaya on the dance ground in front of his village's men's house during a performance of the Yena ceremony in December 1973.
Figure 11.11. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. *Apokibi* (flying fox), 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.6 × 58.8 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.485.
Figure 11.12. Ripples on water of the type depicted in the paintings in Figures 11.13 and 11.14 made by a Kwoma canoe travelling upriver from Ambunti towards the Washkuk Hills, which can be seen in the distance, 2008.
Figure 11.13. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. *Uku vel vel* (Ripples in water), 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.7 × 58.8 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.494.
Figure 11.14. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. *Uku vel vel* (Ripples on water), 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.6 × 58.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.488.
Figure 11.15. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. *Moyi*, a type of spiny fish, 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.6 × 58.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.492.
Figure 11.16. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. A *moyi* fish in the top half of image (see also Figure 11.15) and the 'face' of a scorpion (*mediigiiriigiirii*) in the lower half, 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.7 × 58.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.489.
Figure 11.17. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. The showy white flowers of the *kamaka* tree, 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.6 × 58.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.498.
Figure 11.18. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. The showy white flowers of the *kamaka* tree, 1973. Gouache on paper, 63.7 × 50.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.505.

Figure 11.19. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. Centipede (*medii*). Gouache on paper, 77.3 × 32.6 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.511.

Figure 11.20. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. Non-representational design. Gouache on paper, 91.7 × 58.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.487.

Figure 11.21. The painter and sculptor Apakwinya of Hipo clan, Bangwis village, 1973. He is shown holding two pre-contact fish hooks.

Figure 11.22. Apakwinya of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. Black cockatoo (*wonyiwaga*), 1973. Gouache on paper, 101.0 × 72.0 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.467.

Figure 11.23. Apakwinya of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. Two representations of the 'face' (*misoma*) of a water-walking insect termed *arokojawiyogo*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101 × 72 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.468.

Figure 11.24. Apakwinya of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. A *gwiyibi* bat, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101 × 72 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.469.

Figure 11.25. Apakwinya of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. Two representations of a small water-walking insect termed *makwiilajiir*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101 × 72 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.470.

Figure 11.26. Apakwinya of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. Two representations of the 'face' of a ground-dwelling wasp termed *boboj*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101 × 72 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.472.

Figure 11.27. Apakwinya of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. Representation of a design painted on Nawa ceremony basketry masks owned by the artist's clan, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101 × 72 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.473.

Figure 11.28. Manggwiyow of Hipo clan, Bangwis village, 1973.

Figure 11.29. Manggwiyow of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. A long-nosed fish termed *jagiir*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.6 × 59.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.449.

Figure 11.30. Manggwiyow of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. Shooting star (*maway*), 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.6 × 58.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.500.

Figure 11.31. Manggwiyow of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. A small bat termed *apopeya*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.7 × 58.5 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.453.

Figure 11.32. Wayikola of Awonow clan, Bangwis village, 1973.

Figure 11.33. Wayikola of Bangwis village. Shooting star (*maway*). 1973. Gouache on paper, 101.0 × 72.0 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.454.

Figure 11.34. Wayikola of Bangwis village. Nassa shells (*yas*). 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.7 × 58.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.450.

Figure 11.35. Hanging shell valuables (*ya*) of different kinds from a horizontal beam during a death payment at Bangwis village, 1982

Figure 11.36. The woman named Korowenja of Brugnowi village (Iatmul language group) dressed in ceremonial attire, 1982.
Figure 11.37. Yatiikapa of Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis village. *Gwiyibi* bat in flight, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101.0 × 72.0 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.466.
Figure 11.38. Yatiikapa of Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis village. Design termed *wakatowa*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101.0 × 72.0 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.464.
Figure 11.39. A canoe 'shield' displayed hanging from a post at Brugnowi village (Iatmul language group) with the man named Vi standing beside it for scale, 1983.
Figure 11.40. Meyimbor of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. Waterlily flowers (*ukuba she*), 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.7 × 58.6 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.482.
Figure 11.41. Meyimbor of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. Waterlily flowers (*ukuba she*) shown radiating out from the plant's underwater stem, 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.7 × 58.6 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.499.
Figure 11.42. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis village. Two representations of the 'face' (*misoma*) of a long-legged water-walking insect termed *arokojawiyo-go*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101.0 × 72.0 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.477.
Figure 11.43. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis village. Two representations of a type of edible larva termed *me poko ow*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101.0 × 72.0 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.445.
Figure 11.44. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis village. The green parrot termed *apojin*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101.0 × 72.0 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.476.
Figure 11.45. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis village. The ground-dwelling spider termed *isagwa*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 100.8 × 71.9 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.480.
Figure 11.46. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis village. Dream after the sermon: Joseph's multicoloured cloak, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101.0 × 72.0 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.446.

List of Tables

Table 1.1. Kwoma tribes and villages in the Washkuk Hills (populations based on official censuses in 1971 and 2011)
Table 2.1. Names and village locations of the eighteen Honggwama clans
Table 2.2. Honggwama tribe totemic divisions and selected totems
Table 2.3. Major subjects of 135 bark paintings
Table 2.4. Totemic profile of the three Honggwama villages
Table 5.1. Figurative versus non-figurative designs in 135 Kwoma paintings
Table 5.2. Frequency of different types of symmetry in 135 Kwoma paintings
Table 5.3. Types and combinations of symmetry found in 135 Kwoma bark paintings

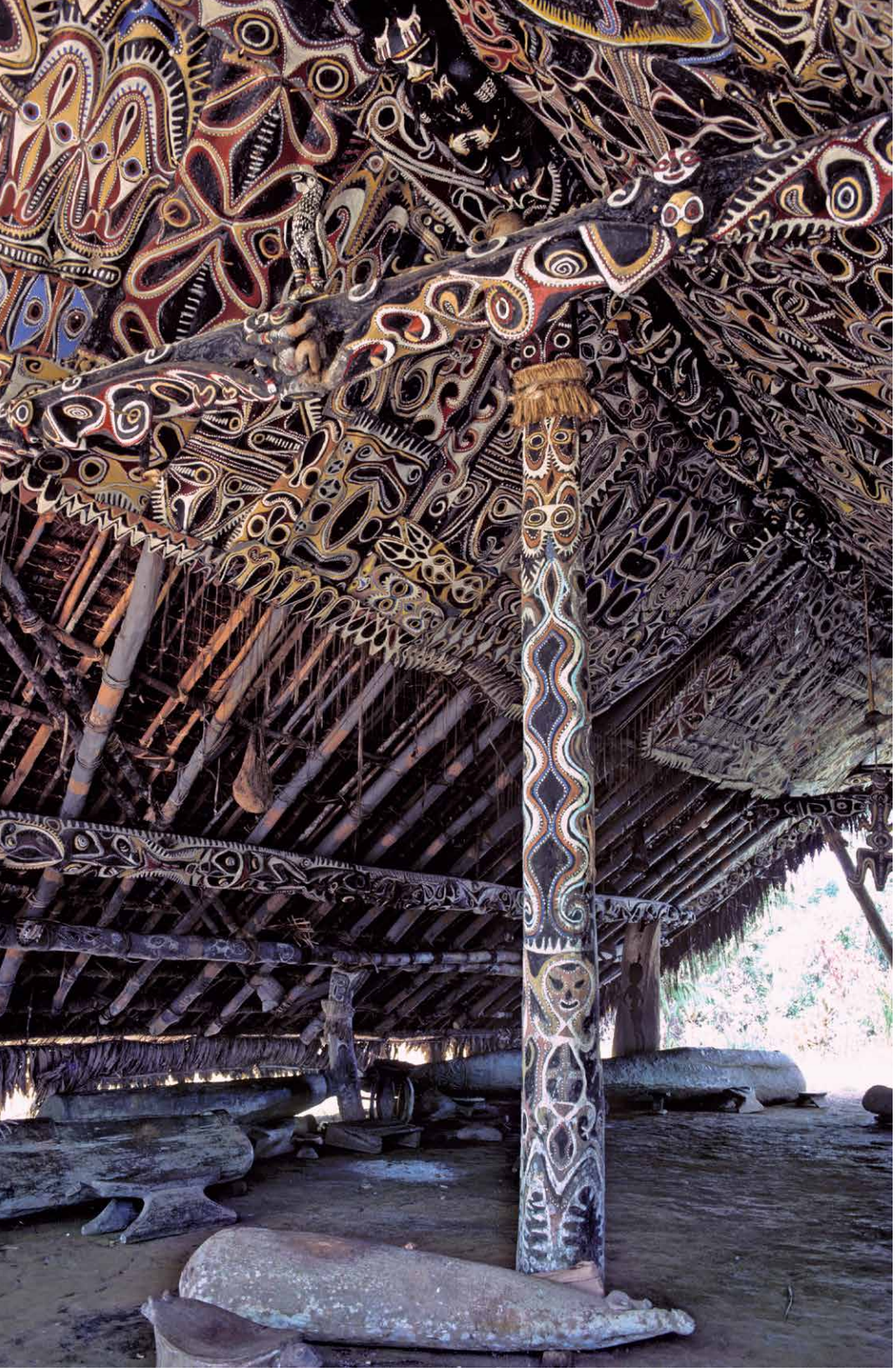

Figure 1.1. Right side of the interior of Nggeyasatuk men's house viewed from the front, Bangwis village, 1987.

1

Sepik painting

The Sepik River region of northern Papua New Guinea is best known to the international art world for the great variety and distinctiveness of its wood sculptures. Scattered in compact villages along the banks of the main river and its many tributaries the small, linguistically fragmented populations that occupy this region have produced a body of three-dimensional or 'plastic' art which is both immediately recognisable stylistically and, at its best, the rival aesthetically of that of any society. But this tropical river valley is also the home of some of the world's most distinctive two-dimensional or graphic art. Like the cultures themselves, the types and styles of the graphic art vary from language group to language group, and even from village to village within the same speech community. Typically, they include figurative and non-figurative designs painted, or incised, on portable utilitarian items, such as food containers and shields, and the posts and ceilings of domestic and ceremonial buildings. However, the most spectacular form visually, but also the least well documented ethnographically, is the painting on sago bark.

In the Sepik, bark paintings are made primarily for display on the facades or in the interiors of men's ceremonial houses. These structures, which can reach up to forty metres in length and ten or more in height, tower over the domestic dwellings that cluster around them and dominate the lives, visually and socially, of the people in whose villages they stand (Behrmann 1950-51; Swadling et al. 1988; Hauser-Schäublin 1989; Craig 1996a; Hauser-Schäublin 2015; Schindlbeck 2015). Throughout the Sepik, men's houses are the venues in which the initiated male members of a community perform rituals, many of which involve the displaying, in secret, of sculptures depicting different types of supernatural beings (Bowden 1983a, 2022). On non-ceremonial occasions men use these buildings as clubhouses where they can congregate – to the exclusion of women – to smoke, chew betel nut and engage in quiet conversation with other male members of the same village and men visiting from other communities (e.g. Figure 1.9). From time to time artists also use the spacious interiors of these buildings as temporary studios in which they can produce bark paintings and finish large sculptures begun in the surrounding forest. Such sculptures might be required for a forthcoming ceremony or for the ornamentation of a new men's house. In villages located on the banks of the Sepik River artists also use these buildings as places to display sculptures and other artworks made for sale to tourists (Bowden 2023b [Part 1], Figure 10). In the river communities most frequently visited by tourists men's houses can even take on the appearance of art supermarkets, where every square metre

Figure 1.2. The canoe-landing at Washkuk village on the northern edge of Napu Lagoon, 1988.

of floor space is taken up with displays of carvings and other objects being offered for sale. When intertribal warfare in this region was still being practised, ceremonial buildings were also the places at which warriors gathered to plan attacks on other villages and to prepare themselves psychologically for the hand-to-hand combat that fighting typically involved (Bowden 2023a). In many parts of the Sepik these buildings were also the places in which a successful war party displayed military trophies, such as – in river communities – the decapitated and decorated heads of enemies killed in intertribal fighting (Kelm 1966-68, vol. 1, Plates 240-82).

The Kwoma

This book provides an account of bark painting in one Sepik society: the Kwoma of the East Sepik Province (see Map). The Kwoma number around 3500 and live in the Washkuk Hills, a 100 square kilometre range of densely forested low mountains situated on the north side of the Sepik immediately to the north and west of Ambunti township, the local administrative centre.

The name Kwoma literally means 'hill people' (*kwow*, hill, mountain; *ma*, people) and is the term the occupants of the Washkuk Hills use to distinguish themselves from their lowland neighbours, both those on the Sepik River to the south and those living along small tributaries of the main river further to the north. They refer to the former, regardless of language group, as 'Kwayama', 'Grass-skirt People' (*kwaya*, grass skirt), a reference to the skirts made of grass and other materials river women traditionally wore, in contrast to Kwoma women who, like the men, went completely naked (Figure 2.12).

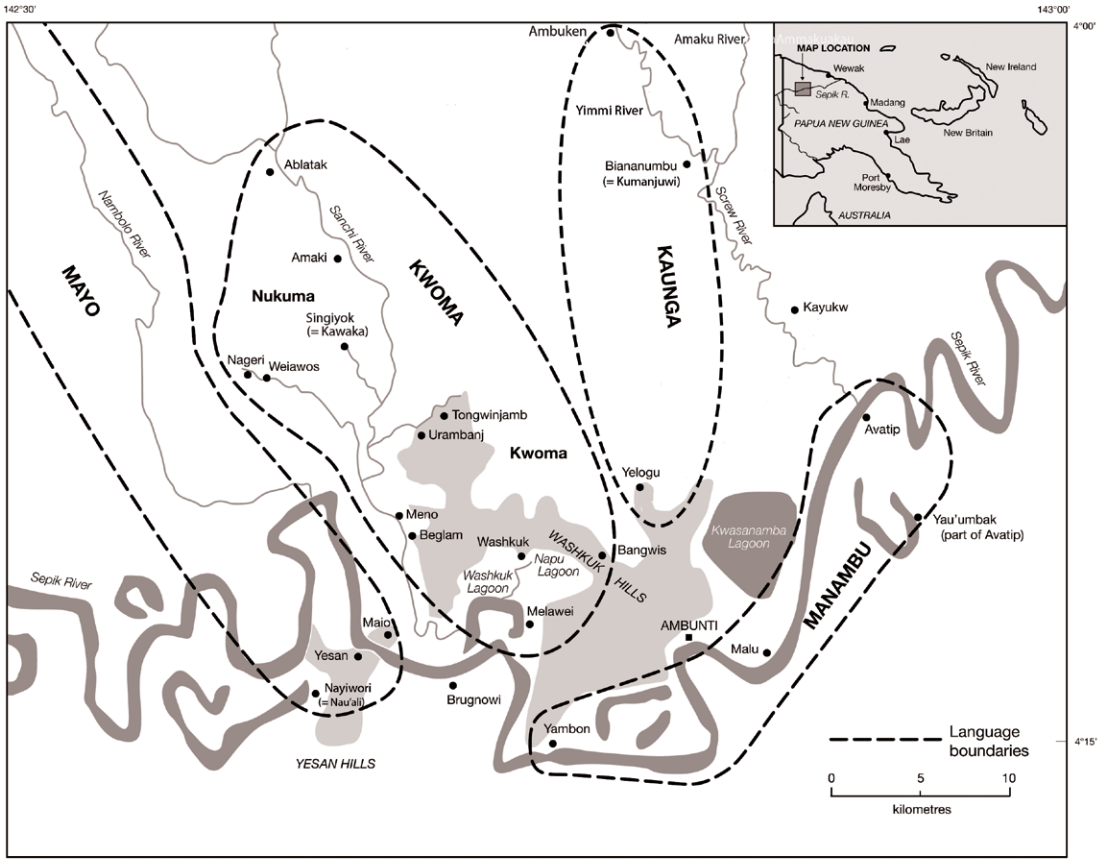

Figure 1.3. Map of Ambunti area.

They refer to neighbours to the north, again regardless of language group, as 'Nukuma', 'Headwater People' (*nuku*, top; Bowden 1997: xiv), a reference to their location on the upper reaches of different small northern tributaries of the Sepik.[1] Among those Kwoma refer to as 'Nukuma' are the members of several villages who speak a dialect of the same language. These Kwoma-speaking Nukuma share most elements of their culture with the 'hill people', but their style of painting on bark, like their art style more generally, differs in important ways. The Nukuma style, in fact, is much more like that of speakers of the Yau dialect of the Mayo language located a few kilometres to their west – another of the peoples who Kwoma know as 'Nukuma'. In this study I am concerned exclusively with the style of painting found in the Washkuk Hills.[2]

1 The 'grass' skirts worn by women in river peoples were made primarily from immature sago palm fronds – material Kwoma refer to as '*kwaya*'.

2 Linguists give the name Kwoma both to the dialect spoken in the Washkuk Hills and the language as a whole (Laycock 1973:24; Wurm and Hattori 1981, Map 6). They give the name Nukuma both to the dialect of Kwoma spoken to the north of the Washkuk range and the larger family to which the language belongs. There are only two languages in this family. The other is Kwanga (also known as Mende; see Laycock 1973:24; Nozawa 2006). Kwanga is spoken by a much larger group of people located on the southern foothills of the Torricelli Mountains fifty kilometres directly to the north of the Washkuk Hills. The total Kwoma-speaking population today is around 7000.

Figure 1.4. Nggeyasatuk men's house, Bangwis, 1988. Nggeyasatuk was constructed and decorated over several years at the end of the 1970s by a group of clans on the northern side of Bangwis village.

The Kwoma (i.e. the occupants of the Washkuk Hills) are divided into four traditionally autonomous communities of the kind conventionally referred to in the ethnographic literature on Melanesia as 'tribes'. Kwoma refer to these groups as *magwil*, the same term they use for individual clans (Table 1.1). Up until the 1950s warfare commonly took place between these four tribes, and between each and neighbouring non-Kwoma groups (Bowden 2022, 2023a). Warfare was precipitated by many factors, most commonly disputes over economic resources. Fighting with spears within a tribe – in contrast to non-lethal fighting with fists or sticks – was strictly prohibited. The prohibition on intra-tribal warfare was backed both by supernatural sanctions and the threat of sorcery practised by other members of the same community.

Up until the 1940s each Kwoma tribe formed a large but discrete settlement group located for defensive purposes on the back of a ridge in the northern half of the Washkuk range (Whiting and Reed 1938-39; Whiting 1941; Mead 1972:210-11). When intertribal fighting came to an end in this region after the Second World War all four tribes relocated their settlements to sites lower down the hills next to or near waterways. They did this partly at the instance of the Australian administration to give greater access to them by government officials, and partly to give their members easier access, by canoe, to the growing township of Ambunti.[3] In the course of these moves two of the tribes – the Kowariyasi and the Honggwama – split into two or more villages: the Kowariyasi into two and the Honggwama into three. Table 1.1 gives the names of the four Kwoma tribes, the seven villages into which they are currently divided, and their populations both at

3 The 'New Guinea' or northern half of modern-day Papua New Guinea (PNG) was administered by Australia after the First World War, initially under a mandate from the League of Nations. Prior to that it had been one of Germany's Pacific colonies. The country became independent in 1975.

Tribe	Village (government spellings)	Population 1971 (and in the 2011 census)
Honggwama	Bangwis Washkuk (= Waskuk) Melawei	349 (916) 319 (394) 85
Kowariyasi	Meno Beglam	181 143 (630)
Tokonggwiyisheembi	Tongwinjamb	515 (1465)
Wurambanj	Urambanj	153

Table 1.1. Kwoma tribes and villages in the Washkuk Hills (populations based on official censuses in 1971 and – in brackets – 2011).

the beginning of the 1970s when I first undertook fieldwork and (in brackets) in 2011 as reported in the last national census (Papua New Guinea National Government 2014:27). That census regrettably does not give figures for all of the villages listed in the table.[4]

Men's houses in the Sepik

Different Sepik peoples use bark paintings to decorate their ceremonial houses in different ways. The Abelam, whose ridgetop villages are located on the southern foothills of the coastal mountains forty kilometres or so to the northeast of the Kwoma, displayed barks both on the gigantic triangular facades of their buildings and, during male initiation rituals, in their dark interiors (Forge 1966, 1970, 1973a, 1979; Swadling et al. 1988, Plates 182-96; Hauser-Schäublin 2015).[5] The Kambot on the Keram River, a southern tributary of the Sepik, display – or at least formerly displayed – barks on the overhanging gables of their equally impressive buildings (Swadling et al. 1988, Plates 197-98, 201). The Iatmul, whose villages are located along the banks of the central section of the Sepik and in the adjacent fenlands, display barks principally in the form of large portable panels inside men's houses (e.g. Figure 9.13). In more bellicose times, Iatmul embellished these painted panels with the dried and decorated heads of enemies killed in intertribal warfare – hence the term 'skull racks' for these objects in the ethnographic literature (Kelm 1966-68, vol. 1, Plate 237; Swadling et al. 1988, Plates 215-224; Craig 1996a:68).

The Kwoma, like the Kwoma-speaking Nukuma, display bark paintings in the interior of their men's houses on the upper half of the ceiling (Figures 1.1, 1.5, 2.1). In contrast to the walled, two-story structures of the Iatmul and many other Sepik peoples, a Kwoma ceremonial house has no walls and structurally consists of nothing more than a steeply pitched thatched roof supported by several rows of posts. In the largest buildings, of which those illustrated in this book are examples, the roof is supported by five rows of posts: one row of centre posts which support the ridgepole, and two rows of shorter posts on each side which support horizontal eaves beams. In smaller men's houses the roof is supported by only three rows of posts: one row in the centre and one row on each side. Each building

4 The results of the 2011 census were published in 2014 (Papua New Guinea National Government 2014). In the 2014 report the spelling of many village names, both Kwoma and others, differs from that in earlier government publications, such as the different editions of the *Village Directory*: e.g. 'Bangus' versus the earlier 'Bangwis', and 'Tangujamb' versus 'Tongwinjamb'. The most comprehensive guide to the spelling of village names and the language groups to which the villages belong is Laycock 1973.

5 Hauser-Schäublin (2022) reports that the Abelam no long construct these buildings.

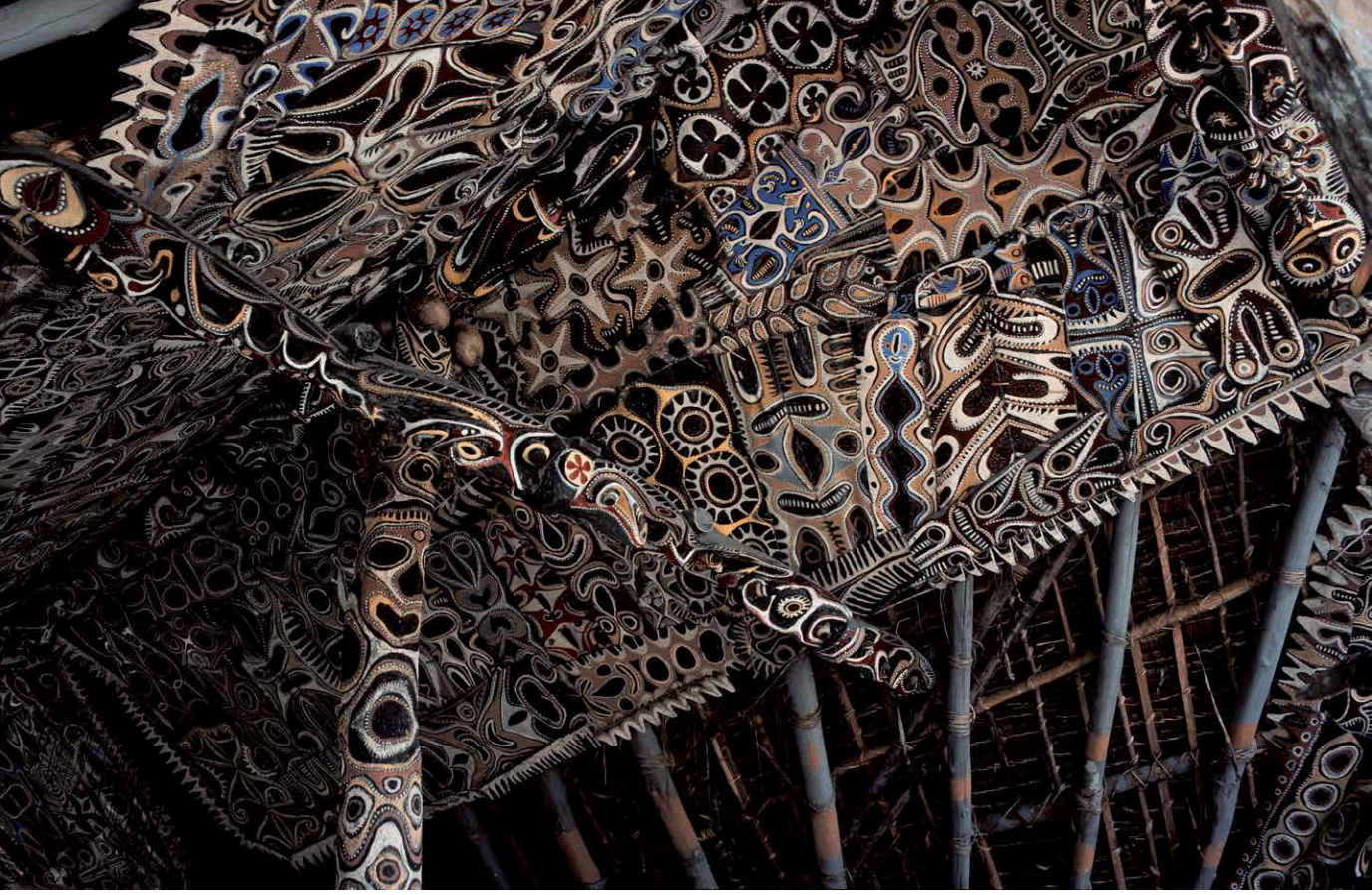

Figure 1.5. Ceiling paintings at the rear of Nggeyasatuk men's house, 1987.

typically also has a pair of posts at each end. These angle out in the form of a V from close to the central long axis and meet the sides of the roof roughly halfway up, where they give the structure added lateral stability.

Although a Kwoma men's house has no walls the two sides of the roof reach so close to the ground that they effectively serve as side walls (Figures 1.4, 1.6). The lower edge of the roof is also fringed with leaf materials which almost touch the ground. This adds to the impression that these building have solid walls.

When the Kwoma were still performing their secret men's rituals people not entitled to participate in a ceremony were required to stay well away from the building. In some villages the uninitiated were permitted at specified times during a ritual to dance and sing at the front of a men's house in time with the singing and drumming of the unseen men inside. But they were only permitted to do so after a tall screen of sago palm branches or coconut fronds had been erected across its open front, or even right around it, to prevent them from seeing the sculptures on display inside (Bowden 1983a, 2022).

In a fully decorated Kwoma men's house bark paintings typically line the whole of the upper half of the ceiling (Figures 1.1, 1.7, 2.1). The paintings are individually lashed to rafters and are customarily displayed cheek by jowl with no spaces between them. In the largest buildings several hundred are displayed. In contrast to the decorated facades of Abelam and Kambot men's houses, Kwoma paintings are not normally arranged to form larger designs. Typically, each forms a separate design which has no necessary relationship to those around it. There are no formal rules, furthermore, governing where individual barks

Figure 1.6. Wayipanal men's house, Bangwis village, 1978. The front of the building is to the right. This building was constructed and decorated over several years in the second half of the 1960s. Until Nggeyasatuk (Figure 1.4) was built at the end of the 1970s Wayipanal was the only ceremonial house in the village and served as the ritual centre and clubhouse for the male members of all of the settlement's different clans.

are to be displayed, but those by the most admired and influential painters, especially those referred to 'master artists' (*woyi siipiikwina neeki tawa yikapwa*), tend to be displayed lower down the ceiling in the most prominent positions visually.[6] Those by less-skilled artists, and especially young men who are still learning to paint (see Chapter 8), are invariably positioned higher up on the ceiling where they are more difficult to see and might even be partially overlapped by those adjacent to them. In any one building the great majority of the barks – like the sculptures that decorate the posts and beams – will have been made by men who live in the village in which the building stands. In all buildings, however, a significant minority of the paintings and other artworks – perhaps 10% – will have been made by men who live in other villages, including those belonging to other Kwoma tribes.

As elsewhere in the Sepik, women lack equivalent structures in which they can congregate to the exclusion of men. Indeed, in this society women never congregate in large numbers in any social context to the complete exclusion of the other sex. Architecturally and socially a woman's life focuses on the domestic dwelling she shares with her husband and unmarried children.

A Kwoma men's house does not need to be decorated with bark paintings and carvings to be used either ceremonially or as a social centre for the men who own it, and many are not. However, the size of a building and the lavishness of its decorative artwork are a source of immense pride to the men and women in the village in which it is located and symbolise

6 The expression I translate here as 'master artist' literally means 'boys (*yikapwa*) who habitually have adzes (*woyi*) and brushes (*siipiikwina*) in their hands (*neeki tawa*)'. The use of the term 'boy' for a master artist is typical of Kwoma humour.

Figure 1.7. The interior of Wayipanal men's house viewed from the front, 1982. Each ceremonial house has a designated 'front' and 'rear', and 'right' and 'left' sides. The right side is the one on the right of a person standing inside a building looking towards its front.

the local community's political power and mastery of ancestral artistic lore (Gell 1998; see also Bowden 2004).

Throughout the Sepik painting on bark is exclusively a man's art form. Before European contact in the Washkuk Hills (at the beginning of the twentieth century) Kwoma women rarely, if ever, entered ceremonial buildings and probably had little detailed knowledge of the bark paintings and other artworks on display. What they did know would have been gleaned mainly from what they could see directly above their heads on the overhanging facades of these buildings when they danced and sang outside them during rituals (Bowden 1983a: Plate 22b, 2023a:90. Today Kwoma women still stay well away from men's houses on non-ceremonial occasions but in some villages they are now permitted to enter them to participate in community meetings. For instance, from the late 1960s until it was demolished in 1994, Bangwis people held regular community meetings in Wayipanal men's house in which every member of the village was entitled to participate (see Bowden 1983a). On these occasions women entered the building through its open back and sat loosely grouped together with any young children in their care in the rear half. Men entered from the front and sat loosely grouped together in the front half, or just outside the front within earshot of the discussion taking place inside (Figure 1.8). The meetings were informally chaired by the village's elected Local Government Councillor (TP *Kaunsil*), the nearest equivalent in this part of New Guinea to a village 'chief'. Men did the bulk of the talking, especially the fiery debating accompanied by foot stamping and aggressive gesturing with adzes that took place when tempers became frayed. But every adult present, including every woman, was entitled to raise matters of concern for public discussion and to be listened to respectfully and in silence.

During these meetings women would often pass their eyes admiringly over the spectacular array of paintings and sculptures on display around them. However, unlike Western tourists visiting a museum or a church they never casually strolled around the building scrutinizing individual paintings or sculptures. But there was no formal taboo on a woman or girl asking men about the subjects of different paintings and sculptures, and many did so in private. A number of the sculptures where thinly disguised copies of the powerful clan spirits which were the focus of the secret rituals then still being performing. Several of these sculptures, such as those with large anthropomorphic faces, peered down on the people below from the lower sides of the crossbeams. If a woman or uninitiated man asked what any of these figures depicted they would be told politely that they were 'purely ornamental' and 'represented nothing'.[7]

Before European contact, Kwoma men prepared the great majority of the barks to be displayed in a new men's house in the building itself once the roof had been thatched and the work could be protected from the weather. Today, as already noted, carvers often finish large sculptures inside these buildings after roughing them out in the forest next to the trees from which they have been cut. However, for convenience they generally work on barks at their individual houses. On these occasions their wives and children are free to watch them work and discuss the subjects of the designs with them. A master painter under pressure to produce a large number of barks for a new building might even get his wife (or wives) and older children to help with some of the more routine and time-consuming aspects

7 To the best of my knowledge, all of the secret men's rituals that the Kwoma (and Nukuma) once performed have now been given up (Bowden 1983a, 2022, 2023b).

Figure 1.8. Men sitting at the front of Wayipanal men's house participating in a village meeting, 1982.

of the work, such as applying varnish to the larger areas of black ground that have been deliberately left unpainted. Apart from menstruating women and those who have recently given birth, who are considered temporarily unclean and are strictly prohibited from coming into direct physical contact either with men or any of the objects with which they are customarily associated, there is no taboo on a woman physically handling a painting while her husband is working on it. But once a bark has been placed on display in a men's house, no sexually mature woman may come into direct physical contact with it or any other part of the building, including the small stools on which many men sit during village meetings. To do so, men say, would 'irritate' the many powerful supernatural beings that are believed to dwell in these structures and expose the woman to supernatural retaliation in the form of a serious accident or a wasting disease.

The Kwoma term for a men's house is '*korobo*' (pronounced 'korombo'), cognates of which are found in many Sepik languages (e.g. Kaunga 'horombo', Kwanga 'kwaramba', and Abelam 'korambo'). When speaking Tok Pisin (New Guinea Pidgin English) Kwoma refer to these buildings either as *haus tambaran* ('spirit houses') or *haus boi* ('men's houses'). In Tok Pisin, the term '*tambaran*' refers both to the spirits associated with these buildings and the cult objects with which they are identified (Mihalic 1971).[8]

8 Older people still use Tok Pisin when communicating with outsiders, but English is now widely spoken at the village level.

The market for barks

In striking contrast to the sculpture produced in this region, which has been avidly sought by collectors from the earliest days of European contact (e.g. Schindlbeck 2015), there has never been a commercial market of any consequence for Sepik bark paintings. One possible reason for this is that unlike the sculpture, much of which is portable and can readily be removed from a village (see Haberland and Schuster 1964; Koch 1968; Melk-Koch 2002), bark paintings form part of the permanent architectural ornamentation of ceremonial houses and unless a building has been abandoned (e.g. Guddemi 1993) barks are not generally available for purchase. This means that anyone wishing to collect barks needs to plan well ahead and commission them, as I have done. Another possible reason is their fragility. Unlike the relatively tough slabs of eucalyptus bark on which Australian Aboriginal artists paint (Caruana 1993), the bark-like material (see Chapter 3) which Sepik artists use is lightweight, easily split, and if directly exposed to the burning tropical sun rapidly and permanently warps (Guddemi 1993, 2011:46). Further, in contrast to Australian Aboriginal painters, who today universally use commercial wood glues as fixatives, Sepik artists make no use of fixatives and when a painting is being transported the pigments can easily be smudged and the design spoiled. These factors, combined with the genuine remoteness of many of the communities in which bark painting is still practised, makes getting barks in good condition to an urban centre where they can be packed and dispatched overseas a major logistical problem, even for a seasoned fieldworker. It is not surprising therefore that no market of any consequence has ever developed for this art form.

Regardless of why none has ever developed, the absence of a thriving market for Sepik barks has had two significant consequences. One is that Sepik peoples have never come under pressure to change their style of painting to make it more palatable commercially.

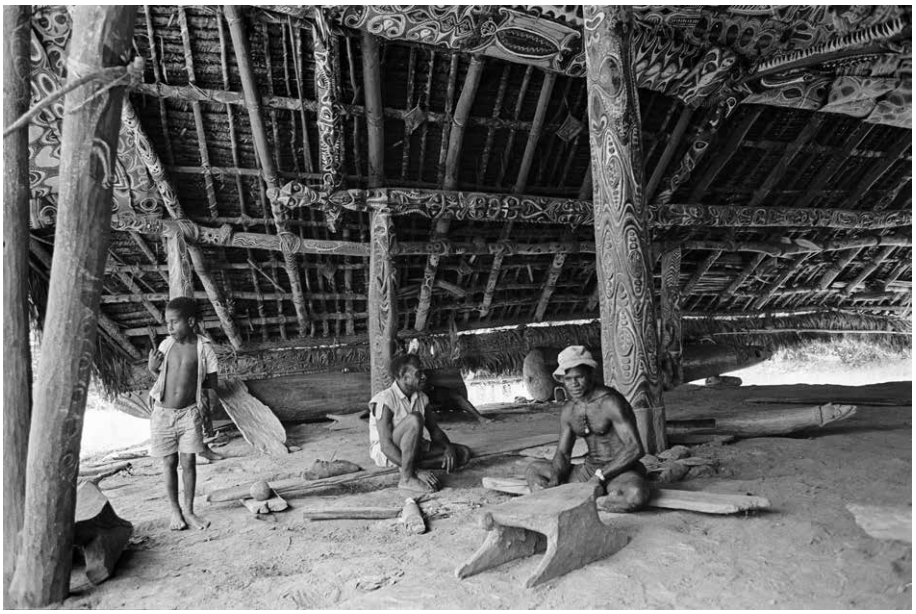

Figure 1.9. Wachongg of Nggiley clan (centre) with one of his young sons in Wayipanal men's house entertaining Adam Koney, a visitor from Brugnowi, a Iatmul-speaking village on the Sepik (see Map), 1978.

This means that the barks still being produced tend to be manufactured exclusively for indigenous purposes, and in the indigenous styles.[9] A second consequence, however, is that if the indigenous reasons for painting disappear this art form will be in danger of dying out. This has already happened in many other parts of New Guinea. Photographs taken in the late nineteenth century along the north coast of the island reveal that coastal peoples formerly constructed ceremonial houses similar in size to those of the Kwoma and lavishly decorated them with their own distinctive styles of bark painting. All of these peoples, however, gave up their rituals long ago when they converted to Christianity and gave up constructing and decorating their extraordinary ceremonial houses (Wronska-Friend 2023). The result is that the great, and diverse, bark painting traditions that once flourished on the north coast of the island have largely if not entirely disappeared. Like all other Papua New Guinea peoples, Kwoma are keen to take advantage of the educational, economic and other opportunities that contact with the West has brought, and as their social and religious priorities change they too might give up constructing and decorating ceremonial houses (Bowden 2023b). If they do, and if there is no counterbalancing commercial reason to continue painting, their style of painting on bark could also disappear. Paradoxically, as the flourishing market for Aboriginal bark paintings has amply demonstrated, in times of rapid social change one of the best ways of ensuring that an indigenous art tradition survives, and even develops creatively, is through the establishment of a vibrant market for its products. Of the thousands of bark paintings that are produced in Australia every year today, few would continue to be produced if the commercial market for them suddenly collapsed. There should be nothing surprising about this. After all, how much of the best and the most creative modern Western art would continue to be produced if artists could not sell their work?

The barks documented in this book

This study is based on a set of 135 paintings which I had the opportunity to discuss in detail with the men who produced them. All 135 derive from the Honggwama, the southernmost of the four Kwoma tribes. The great majority were produced at Bangwis village. The ten oldest were produced in the second half of the 1960s and were photographed in situ on the ceiling of Wayipanal men's house at Bangwis. When this building was demolished in 1994 to make way for a new men's houses on the same site – an event that I did not witness – most if not all of its bark paintings and much of its other artwork was burnt. None of these ten oldest works, therefore, is still extant. The other 125 barks were all commissioned by me at different times between 1972 and 1988. Twenty-five are now in the Papua New Guinea National Museum and another 45 in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (Australia).

In addition to those in the two art museums just named, important collections of Kwoma paintings are held by the Queensland Art Gallery (Brisbane, Australia), the Museum of

9 In Australia the most successful style of bark painting commercially makes extensive use of cross-hatching. This stylistic feature originated in northeast Arnhem Land but its popularity in the art market, both nationally and internationally, has led artists in many communities where it was not found previously, such as on Groote Eylandt, to incorporate it into their designs. In recent years Aboriginal barks destined for the 'fine' art market, as distinct from the tourist trade (Graburn 1976), have also grown dramatically in size, evidently in competition with the often huge, and even more successful, 'dot' paintings on canvas now being produced in their thousands annually in different Central and Western Desert Aboriginal communities.

World Cultures, Frankfurt am Main (Germany), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), the Bishop Museum (Hawaii) and the Basel Museum of Cultures (Switzerland). Most of the paintings in these collections date from after the Second World War. The Basel collection principally derives from the Kowariyasi tribe. The Frankfurt and Metropolitan barks, like those illustrated in this book, derive from the Honggwama tribe. The Queensland and Bishop Museum collections derive from the Tongwinjamb tribe. Many are illustrated on these institutions' websites. Publications that illustrate Kwoma paintings include Guiart 1963:179; Haberland and Schuster 1964:90-91; Kaufmann 1979; Münzel 1987, vol.1, p. 63 and Kelm 1966-68, vol. 2, Plate 128.

Figure 2.1. View of the left side of the interior of Wayipanal men's house showing ceiling paintings and carvings decorating the main posts and beams, 1982.

2

Images of Identity

The bark paintings that decorate a Kwoma men's house are one of two broadly distinguishable types of art in these buildings. The other consists of the polychrome sculptures carved on (or attached to) the various posts and beams as well as on the finials of slit-gongs (Figure 2.1). With some exceptions these two types differ in form – two-dimensional versus three-dimensional – in style and in subject matter.

The sculptures, are predominantly figurative in style and depict spirits (*sikiyawas*), the powerful supernatural beings who Kwoma believe created their culture at the beginning of history. Their creative activities are described in myths (Chapter 7; see also Bowden 2022). In myths, supernatural beings adopt a variety of forms, including that of humans.

The bark paintings in contrast are predominantly non-figurative in style and take as their subjects not spirits but clan totems (Bowden 1983a:16-34). 'Non-figurative' in this context, it needs to be noted, does not mean 'non-representational'. With very few exceptions, all bark paintings depict one named entity or another but only a small number (see Chapter 5) bear a direct visual resemblance to the entities they depict. Kwoma paintings, in other words, are predominantly non-figurative or 'abstract' but nevertheless representational. The majority of the barks on display in a men's house represent totemic animals, plants and other entities belonging to the clans that own the building. No two men's houses, furthermore, are decorated in precisely the same way. The variations in the way buildings are decorated, and in the subjects of the paintings and sculptures on display, form visual analogues of the distinct social and political identities of the communities in which they are located.

The totemic structure of Kwoma tribes

Each of the 20 or so clans (*magwil*) into which each Kwoma tribe is divided 'owns' up to 100 or more plant, animal and other totems (*sabo*).[10] A clan does not necessarily own all of its totems exclusively but shares the majority, possibly all, with one or more other clans. Different clans which share the same, or broadly similar, sets of totems make up named totemic divisions. These divisions cross tribal boundaries. To the best of my knowledge Kwoma have no terms for these groups other than their proper names. The

10 The Tok Pisin (TP) term for totem is '*pisin*'. This is also the term for bird (from English 'pigeon').

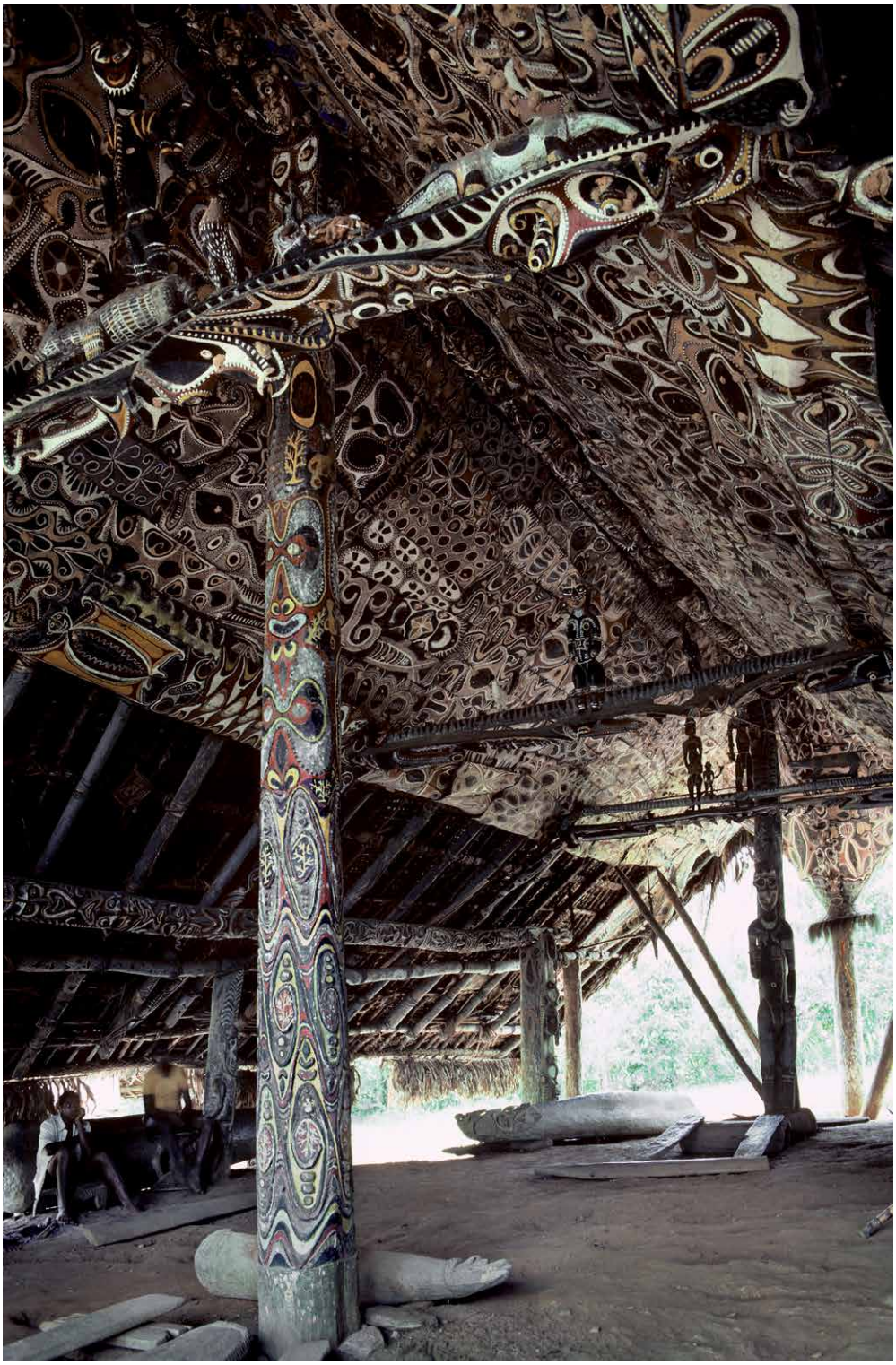

Figure 2.2. The right side of the interior of Wayipanal men's house viewed from the front left corner, 1987.

Name	Village
1. Nowil Tek 2. Yanggaraka Nendiikawek Tek 3. Mbanggwatapa Nendiikawek Tek 4. Tokimba Nendiikawek Tek 5. Meyimbambur Nendiikawek Tek 6. Awonow Tek 7. Wurambaj 8. Nggiley 9. Hipo Hamikwa	Bangwis
10. Cheembireekii Wanyi 11. Soputapa Wanyi 12. Kwowembi Wanyi 13. Nokwasamba Wanyi 14. Kisur Hamikwa 15. Manggiir Hamikwa 16. Nggwiyisheembi Hamikwa	Washkuk
17. Amachey Keyava 18. Wapiyupu Keyava	Melawei

Table 2.1. Names and village locations of the eighteen Honggwama clans.

eighteen clans that compose the Honggwama tribe are divided into six totemic divisions (Tables 2.1 and 2.2).[11]

Each clan takes its name from the totemic division to which it belongs. If a tribe contains only one clan belonging to a particular totemic group, the clan's name is the same as that of its totemic division, as in the case of Wurambanj and Nggiley clans at Bangwis (Table 2.1). But if a tribe contains two or more clans belonging to the same totemic division each distinguishes itself from the others by means of one or more additional names. These might refer to a former village where the clan's forebears once lived, a ceremonial house the clan once owned, or a particular totemic entity to which the group claims an especially close customary relationship. For instance, Nowil Tek, the largest and politically most influential clan at Bangwis, is one of six clans in the village that belong to the same totemic division, all of which share the name Tek. To distinguish themselves from the other five Tek groups, the members of this clan use the additional name Nowil (variant Nowiy), taken from a small hill on the north side of the Sepik about forty kilometres west of the Washkuk range where the ancestors of this group were once located (see Bowden 1997: xiii-xv). The name Nowil Tek literally means 'The Tek group formerly located at Nowil'.[12]

Any man is entitled to depict in a bark painting one or other of his clan's totems. A man is also entitled to depict entities owned by other totemic divisions, but only if he has obtained permission to do so from one or more of their male members. To represent a totemic entity belonging to another group without permission would be interpreted as an attempt to 'steal' it, that is, as an attempt to claim for the artist's clan (and larger totemic division) the numerous rights that ownership of a totem entails. These include the right to name children and pets after it, and to initiate the singing in public of the myths in which the totem figures, and after which myths are often named.[13] If a painter is suspected of depicting a totem illegally, men who claim ownership of it will demand that he publicly acknowledge which totemic division owns the entity in question. They might even demand that he destroy the bark. If he refuses to do so, the artist risks precipitating a violent and

11 The spelling of clan names in this study follows that of Bowden 1997. Some spellings vary slightly from those in my book *Yena: art and ceremony in a Sepik society* (Bowden 1983a; see, for example, p. 13).

12 'Tek' is an abbreviation of 'Teki'. In everyday life Kwoma abbreviate many names. In earlier publications this name was written 'Teeki'.

13 Myths, like totems, are owned by different totemic divisions.

Figure 2.3. Bark paintings on the right side of the ceiling, rear half of Wayipanal men's house, 1978.

Figure 2.4. Bark painting of a flying fox (*apokibi*), Wayipanal men's house (front left corner). Painting made *c*1968. Photo 1972.

Name of totemic division (listed alphabetically)	Selected totems
1. Hamikwa	bird of paradise (*manu*), fish eagle (*aponyumay*), *hami* tree (TP *ton*)
2. Keyava	crocodile (*mo*), moon (*niiwiika*), sun (*ya*), *nyeebi* tree (TP *garamut*)
3. Nggiley	*gey* lizard, *isagwa* spider, *meer* tree (TP *bikus*)
4. Tek	clay pot (*awo*), dog (*asa*), sago palm (*noku*), *wonyi* tree (TP *arima*)
5. Wanyi	cassowary (*aposhebu*), pig (*poyi*), *wun* hardwood tree (TP *kwila*)
6. Wurambanj	breadfruit tree (*wachii*), *mawujii* palm, Striped possum (*yirimagu*)

Table 2.2. Honggwama tribe totemic divisions and selected totems. In my dictionary of Kwoma (Bowden 1997) *wun* is spelt *wiin*, and *wonyi* is spelt *wiiny*. The revised spellings are based on research undertaken since the dictionary was compiled.

potentially lethal confrontation between his and the owners' clans as well as exposing himself to covert retaliation through sorcery (*siiga kapa*) designed to seriously injure his health, or even kill him (Bowden 1987).

The male members of each clan, regardless of their group's size, are entitled to build their own ceremonial house and decorate it as lavishly as they wish with paintings and sculptures. Most Kwoma clans, however, are small, averaging (in 1973) fewer than ten married male members each, and normally the members of several neighbouring clans in the same village will jointly construct and make use of a single building. The building is nominally owned by the group that initiates its construction, and on whose land it is typically located, but all of the clans actively involved in its construction are counted as joint owners and have equal access to it for all ceremonial and other purposes.

The subjects of paintings

Each bark painting has one named entity as its major subject. This is usually a totemic animal or plant owned by the artist's clan (and larger totemic division). The major subject will be depicted either once, by a motif placed centrally on the bark and occupying the greater part of the picture surface, or two or more times by notionally identical motifs distributed symmetrically over the painted area (Chapter 5). In addition to its major subject a painting might depict one or more other entities. These other entities are typically represented by smaller motifs distributed around the periphery of the bark. Kwoma artists abhor vacuums in designs and any large areas of bark that remain unpainted once the major subject has been depicted will be embellished with supplementary motifs, either representational or non-representational. To leave a large area of a bark unpainted, men say, 'spoils' a design.

Table 2.3 indicates the major subjects of the 135 paintings that form the basis of this study. Of these paintings 106 (80%) depict clan totems – either totems belonging to the artists' clans or other groups. The subjects represented fall into five broad categories: (1) animals, (2) plants, (3) inanimate objects, (4) spirits and (5) mythological figures.

The entities most commonly represented are animals, which form the major subjects of 69 or 51% of the 135 barks. Thirty-four named varieties of animals are depicted. Those most commonly represented are insects. The most commonly represented insect is the butterfly (e.g. Figures 2.5, 10.34). As well the butterfly itself a number of the barks depict entities associated with the life cycle of this insect, such as butterfly cocoons – entities which Kwoma identify as 'eggs' (e.g. Figures 2.5, 10.35). The large number of butterflies

Figure 2.5. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a butterfly (*aposiibiiruka*), Tek totem, 110 × 70 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery. The butterfly in this painting is represented twice, once in the upper half of the design, and once, in mirror reflection (Chapter 5), in the lower half. The animal is represented with its wings still furled at the moment when it emerges from its cocoon at the end of its pupal stage. The representation disarticulates the insect anatomically. The two large heart-shaped forms outlined in white and yellow in both the upper and lower halves of the bark represent what the artist identified as the insect's 'face' (*misoma*). Each face displays two large black 'eyes', a 'nose' in the form of a black pointed oval and a black heart-shaped 'mouth'. The mouth contains a row of white 'teeth'. The two areas of white dotting on either side of the nose represent what the artist described as decorative markings on the insect's wings. The furled wings are represented by the two large red triangular forms outlined in white on each side of the design, the apexes of which touch in the physical centre of the bark. The hook shapes enclosed by these triangular forms depict the insect's antennae. The black roundels in the centre of the same triangular forms represent circular markings on the animal's wings. The white *wariigey* border decoration at both the top and bottom of the bark, and the other motifs, are non-representational.

among the subjects of these 135 paintings reflects the fact that the great majority of the barks were produced at Bangwis, six of whose nine clans belong to the Tek totemic division, which owns the butterfly totem and other entities (such as cocoons) associated with it. The Washkuk Hills abound in butterflies of different kinds, including several of the large and spectacular Birdwing varieties, the largest butterflies in the Australasian region (D'Abrera 1971:48-49, 62-3).

Other commonly depicted animals in these 135 paintings are winged mammals, principally flying foxes, and birds. Sixteen paintings depict flying foxes (of six named varieties) and nine birds (six varieties).

Plants form the major subjects of 20 (15%) of the barks. The variety of plant most commonly depicted is the *bodi* tree (e.g. Figures 2.8, 2.9), of which there are several named sub-types.[14] The *bodi* tree produces mature orangey-red fruit similar in size and colour to a small orange (Figure 2.9). The fruit are inedible but because of the brightness of their colour they are widely used, commonly strung together in long ropes or swags, as decorations in ritual and other contexts. One variety of *bodi* fruit has a ring of protuberances adjacent to the stalk which bear a striking resemblance to the mature female breast. Like the butterfly, this variety (known as 'female' *bodi*) is owned by the Tek division. In common with many of the other totemic entities represented in paintings the different varieties of *bodi* tree

14 '*Bodi*' is pronounced 'mbondi'. In earlier publications I used the commonly used 'abbreviation' (as Kwoma say) for this term: '*bodii*'. Cognates of the name for this tree are found in many Sepik languages. In Iatmul it is 'mbuandi' (Bateson 1958:20) and in Kaunga 'pwandi' (spelt *pwadi* in Bowden 2023a:199). Bateson identified one variety of this tree as *Ervatamia aurantiaca*.

Figure 2.6. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of an edible fern (*noku wojiya*), Tek totem, 132 × 67, 1988. The young fronds of the *noku wojiya* fern are typically eaten as an ingredient in vegetable soups. In the painting, the black pointed ovals arranged in a column in the centre of the design depict the fern's stem or rachis, and the red triangular forms outlined in white on each side its edible young fronds or leaf segments. The fern grows prolifically in sago palm forests and because of this association, the artist said, the plant is a totem of the Tek group of clans which owns the sago palm totem. The type of fern in question is shown in Figure 2.7.

Figure 2.7. Yatiikapa of Bangwis village holding a specimen of the type of edible fern termed *noku wojiya* depicted in the painting illustrated in Figure 2.6, 1987.

and their fruit have complex mythological associations (see Chapter 10). Regardless of the clan or village to which they belong all adults are familiar with the different stories in which this tree figures and whenever they pass their eyes over representations of *bodi* fruit they are subtly reminded of these narratives and the moral values and other issues they raise. One well-known myth associated with the 'female' (*mima*) variety of this tree is summarised in the commentary on the painting illustrated in Figure 10.7 in Chapter 10 (see also Bowden 1982).

Plants and animals together form the major subjects of 89 (66%) of the 135 paintings. Twenty-eight (21%) of the barks take inanimate objects as their major subjects. The three most commonly depicted inanimate objects are shooting stars (seven paintings), waves on rivers and lagoons (six paintings), and anthropomorphic faces (six paintings).

Shooting stars, like waves on rivers and lagoons, are not 'owned' by any one clan or totemic division but form one of the 'free' or 'public' non-totemic entities which any man can depict. A shooting star is thought to be the soul (*mayi*) of a prominent man who has recently died flying through the night sky from the village in which he lived to its final resting place in the underworld beneath one or other of the large lagoons that flank the Washkuk Hills. In the underworld the soul lives on in human form as a ghost (*gaba*). All souls of the dead are thought to become anthropomorphic ghosts in the underworld but only those of the most prominent men manifest themselves as shooting stars when they are

Figure 2.8. Meyimbor, Hipo clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of the fruit of a *yobo bodi* tree, Hamikwa totem, 100 × 60 cm, 1988. The black roundels arranged in columns on the two sides of the bark are different depictions of the bright yellow and orange fruit of the variety of the *bodi* tree named *yobo bodi* (literally 'tree kangaroo *bodi*'), one of the artist's clan totems. The more irregular black forms arranged as a column in the centre of the design represent the leafy branches (*tapa*) from which the fruit hang.

Figure 2.9. Fruit and leaves of one of several varieties of *bodi* tree, Bangwis village, 1978.

Category	Number of named varieties	Percentage of all varieties depicted	Number of barks	Percentage of all barks
Animal	34	61%	69	51%
a. insects	(14)	(25%)	(29)	(21%)
b. flying mammal	(6)	(11%)	(16)	(12%)
c. bird	(6)	(11%)	(9)	(7%)
d. other animal	(8)	(14%)	(15)	(11%)
Plants	9	16%	20	15%
Inanimate objects	8	14%	28	21%
Spirits	4	7%	16	12%
Mythical entities	1	2%	2	1%
Total	56	100%	135	100%

Table 2.3. Major subjects of 135 bark paintings

travelling through the night sky on their way to their final resting places. In bark paintings, a shooting star is customarily given an anthropomorphic face; this typically displays a pair of clearly delineated eyes, a nose and usually also a mouth. The face typically surmounts a triangular white or yellow tail which artists often identify with the long streak of light seen in the night sky when a shooting star passes overhead.

The waves that form the subjects of six paintings are those that suddenly form on long straight sections of the Sepik River, or on large lagoons, when strong winds start blowing. Representations of choppy waves are among the most striking of all Kwoma designs on bark (see the examples in Chapter 10).

Figure 2.10. Mburunggay of Amachey clan, Melawei village, standing beside six paintings he produced for the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery, 1982. All six paintings depict entities 'owned' by the totemic division to which the artist's clan belongs. From the left the paintings depict (1) a type of waterlily plant (*ukuba*), 155 × 40 cm (approx.), (2) an aquatic insect named *uku'ayeep,* 110 × 60 cm (approx.), (3) a water spirit named Hakalamba, 130 × 40 cm (approx.), (4) a flying fox (*apokibi*), 110 × 65 cm (approx.), (5) the moon (*niiwiika*) in its different phases, 150 × 40 cm (approx.), and (6) cannibal spirits collectively named Takwarumb which live below a forest spring of the same name to the north of the Washkuk Hills, 150 × 35 cm (approx.; see also Figure 10.44).

The anthropomorphic faces depicted in six of the 135 barks are two-dimensional versions of carved representations of unnamed spirits (*sikiyawas*; also termed *aroko*) that decorate beams in men's houses, especially the major eaves beams (see Figures 9.6 and 9.7).

The two other types of entities that provide the major subjects of paintings consist of named individual spirits (e.g. Figure 2.10, third painting from left) and named personages in myths (e.g. Figure 9.12). Individually named spirits and mythological personages are common subjects of sculptures but they are depicted much less frequently in bark paintings. Of the 135 barks in the sample, 16 (12%) represent spirits and only two (1%) named personages in myths. The spirits depicted are all closely associated with different parts of the natural environment. The majority are 'water spirits' (*pak tawa sikiyawas*; literally 'water-dwelling spirits'): supernatural beings whose permanent places of abode are in the underworld at the bottom of unusually deep sections of forest streams, springs or lagoons. The others are 'forest spirits' (*kwashek tawa sikiyawas*; literally 'forest-dwelling spirits'): supernatural beings associated with different parts of the forest.

Many 'forest spirits' are believed to occupy prehistoric stone mortars, large numbers of which are scattered throughout the Washkuk Hills and adjacent hilly regions. One is located on the top of Bangwis hill and is the home of a powerful female spirit named Supundonggwa. This supernatural being gives her name both to the stone artefact she inhabits and the hill on which the mortar is located. Kwoma know nothing of the prehistoric peoples who made these stone artefacts, or how the objects were used, and even deny that they were made by humans. They believe that they were made by the spirits that inhabit them and after which they are named. Like all supernatural beings (*sikiyawas*), spirits associated with natural entities are said to be 'irritated' if people behave 'disrespectfully' in their vicinity, such as by casually mentioning their names or

Figure 2.11. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a woman's stomach scar (*mokwoy*), not totemic, 115.5 × 79.7 cm, 1978. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.394. This painting represents the type of decorative scar which women formerly had cut on their stomachs when they reached puberty and before they had their first child (Figure 2.12; see also Whiting 1941:106, Plate 4). The keloids were regarded as a mark of female beauty and formerly could be clearly seen as Kwoma women, like men, went completely naked. The designs were cut by experienced artists, such as the man who produced this painting. The designs depicted totemic plants and animals of the clans to which the women belonged. The design in this painting does not represent a plant or animal but the decorative scar itself. Men had smaller decorative designs cut into their chests and backs (Figure 2.12). Many women chose not have these marks of beauty cut on their bodies after the Second World War when they adopted European clothing.

touching the objects they inhabit without good cause. To 'irritate' a spirit risks having it retaliate violently, such as by causing the culprit to suffer a serious accident or other misfortune (see Bowden 1983a:90-91).

Like all supernatural beings 'nature' spirits are thought to be capable of adopting different forms at will, including those of humans, plants and animals. Both painted and carved representations of such beings typically show them in the form of one of the powerful forest or aquatic animals with which they are associated, often a crocodile or giant python.

Men say that they depict spirits in bark paintings typically after seeing them in dreams or in images in water – the two contexts in which spirits most commonly reveal themselves to humans. The paintings, artists say, serve as records of their distinctive appearances.

Named mythological figures are the least common of all the entities depicted in bark paintings. Of the 135 barks on which this study is based only two depict such entities. One of the two mythological figures represented in these paintings is a young unmarried woman named Tumbishikay (Figure 9.12). In the myth named after her this woman is crushed to death by a forest spirit in the form of a giant python. When her parents bury her body her broken bones transform, progressively over several days, into different varieties of birds, including the domestic fowl. Kwoma cite this myth as the explanation for how their ancestors acquired the domestic chicken. Unlike domestic fowls today, the chickens that originated from Tumbishikay's bones had enormously long tails which they dragged along the ground behind them. (For a more detailed account of this mythical woman see the commentary on Figure 9.12.)

The second of the two named mythological figures depicted in these paintings is a male culture hero named Masembeyakapa. This personage plays a prominent role in a myth that describes the building of the first ceremonial house named Wambon, the

Figure 2.12. Three young Kwoma adults in 1930. Photo courtesy of Mrs J.H.L. McGuigan. The woman has a decorative keloid on her stomach of the kind depicted in the painting in Figure 2.11. The photographer is not known but was probably Fr. Franz Kirschbaum, a Catholic missionary of the Society of the Divine Word and the first European to settle permanently on the Sepik (Kahn 2023:63-75). Comments by Kwoma who examined this photograph suggest that the image has been reversed at some point in its history, for the raised scars on the men's right sides were normally cut on the left of the body so as not interfere with their spear-throwing arms while healing (e.g. Schindlbeck 2015:62). In 1978 two Bangwis men: Wachongg of Nggiley clan and Kwalawi of Nowil clan, identified the two men as Dowamakway of Nowil clan on the left and Apatap Apakup of Nokwasamba clan on the right, both of whom by then were deceased. They identified the woman as Kopatakwa of Nggwiyisheembi clan; when the photograph was taken she was married to the man on the right (Apatap). She was still alive in 1978 and living at Washkuk village. Regrettably I did not have the opportunity to meet her and show her the photograph.

Figure 2.13. Ceremonial clay food bowl (*awomar*) made *c*1900 by Meer'ow of Nggiley clan, Honggwama tribe, (H) 26.1 x (W) 24.6 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.439. The totemic animals, plants and other entities depicted on ceremonial bowls of the type illustrated are identical to those represented in bark paintings. The incised design on this bowl depicts an *isagwa* spider, a totem of artist's clan (see also Figure 11.45). The several named varieties of this ground-dwelling spider were formerly eaten and prized as a delicacy. Like sago grubs, the animal was baked wrapped in leaves. Only the abdomen was consumed. The spider is no longer eaten because it is not 'fashionable' to do so, and because the Seventh Day Adventist Church, which is active in the Ambunti area, regards it as unclean.

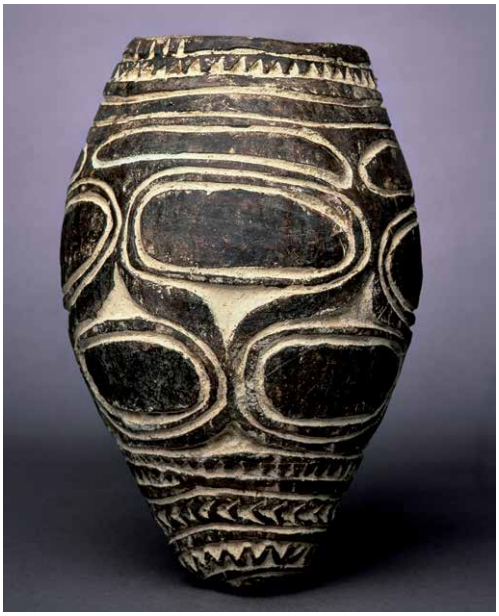

Figure 2.14. Ceremonial clay food bowl (*awomar*) made *c*1950 by Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis village, (H) 24 x (W) 16.2 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.440. The design is incised in low relief. The incised lines are filled with white pigment. The ovoid forms depict *bodi* fruit, one of the artist's clan totems (see Figure 2.9). *Bodi* fruit are also a common subject of bark paintings (e.g. Figure 2.8). One by the man who made this pot is illustrated in Figure 10.27.

prototype, Kwoma believe, of all ceremonial houses built since then that have had the same name. (A summary of this myth is given in Chapter 11 in the commentary on the painting on paper illustrated in Figure 11.9; see also Bowden 2022:30-40.)

The subjects of paintings and the totemic profiles of different villages

As already noted, the subjects of the paintings on display in Kwoma men's houses vary from building to building. They vary, furthermore, in keeping with the totemic structure of the communities in which they are located. This is a consequence of three things. First, the great majority (roughly 90%) of the paintings on display in any one building are produced by members of the clans that own it. Second, artists predominantly take as the subjects of their designs totemic entities owned either by their own clans (and larger totemic divisions) or by clans belonging to other totemic divisions in their own villages. Roughly 70% of the paintings a man produces depict either totems owned by his own clan or other clans in

Table 2.4. Totemic profile of the three Honggwama villages

Village (Honggwama tribe)	Totemic profile (i.e. totemic divisions represented)
Bangwis	Tek + Wurambanj + Nggiley + Hamikwa
Washkuk	Wanyi + Hamikwa
Melawei	Keyava

his own village. Third, although the totemic divisions to which the different clans belong cut across tribal boundaries, in any one tribe the clans that belong to the same totemic division tend to cluster together, forming either a distinct hamlet within the tribe's larger settlement or a separate village.

The tendency for clans belonging to the same totemic division to cluster together residentially entails that each of the hamlets, or villages, belonging to the same tribe has a distinct totemic 'profile'. This is illustrated by the three villages into which the Honggwama tribe is presently divided (Table 2.4; see also Table 2.1). Bangwis village is composed predominantly of clans belonging to the Tek totemic division (six out of nine clans); Washkuk is composed exclusively of clans belonging to the Wanyi and Hamikwa divisions; and Melawei is composed of clans belonging to the Keyava totemic division.

Given that artists predominantly depict totemic entities owned by their own clans – or other clans in the same village – and that each residentially discrete cluster of clans within a tribe has a distinct totemic profile, the subjects of the paintings on display in a men's house both reflect the distinct totemic affiliations of the community in which the building is located and symbolise the distinct social identity of the group of clans that owns it. Kwoma themselves are well aware of this. People often say that if a visitor from another tribe were to walk into a fully decorated men's house for the first time, he could correctly deduce the totemic affiliations of the clans that own the building simply on the basis of the subjects of the paintings on display.

The subjects of paintings and the plant and animal foods most commonly eaten

Significantly, there is no direct correlation between the subjects of Kwoma bark paintings and the animals and plants on which the people rely daily for food. Economic considerations, therefore, are not the determinants of what artist's depict in their paintings. For instance, of the 56 named varieties of entities (animal, plant etc.) that provide the major subjects of the paintings on which this study is based (Table 2.3) only 21 (38%) are used as food. These consist of 16 of the 34 varieties of animals and five of the nine varieties of plants. Even more strikingly, only one of the plant or animal foods which Kwoma eat on a regular basis forms the major subject of any of these designs. The plant foods most commonly eaten are sago, bananas, coconuts, greens (of various kinds), yams, breadfruit, sweet potato (an introduced plant), taro and pandanus fruit. The animals most commonly eaten are fish, pig and cassowary (the last two are eaten much less frequently than fish). Of these twelve foods, taro is the only one that forms the major subject of any of the paintings in the set, and then only in one case.

From a cross-cultural perspective the poor correlation between the subjects of Kwoma bark paintings and the plants and animals on which the people rely for food is not atypical. Sixty years ago the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss noted that the natural species that figure in totemic systems of social classification, and form the major subjects of the art of 'totemic' societies, are typically much better to 'think with' than 'eat' (Lévi-Strauss 1963:62, 87; 1966).

Figure 3.1. Ceiling paintings, front right corner of Nggeyasatuk men's house, Bangwis village, 1987.

3

The Technology of Painting

The raw materials

The material on which Kwoma artists paint derives from the stem of a dry sago-palm branch (Figures 3.2-3.9). Dry branches are found in abundance on the floor of sago forests where they have either fallen naturally from growing palms or been cut off when the palms were felled to extract their edible starch, the local staple (Figure 3.4). Botanically, the sago-palm branch is a giant leaf and the stem a giant leafstalk or petiole. Mature leaves grow up to five metres or more in length, and leafstalks around two metres. In the ethnographic literature bark cut from the leafstalk is often referred to as a 'spathe', but this is incorrect (e.g. Forge 1973b:180; Guddemi 1993:70; Mead 1963:9). The spathe, or bract, of the sago palm is a flexible bark-like material that envelops the developing flowers and fruit at the top of the palm (Blombery and Rodd 1982; Ruddle et al. 1978; Jones 1984). In some Sepik societies artists do occasionally paint on palm spathes but in the Washkuk Hills they exclusively use material cut from the dry leafstalk.[15] Technically, the latter is not bark either, which is the rind of trees and other plants with woody stems; but for convenience this term will be used for the material on which artists paint.

The leafstalk of the sago palm is U-shaped in cross-section and tapers towards its outer end. It has a rough, corrugated outer side and a mirror-smooth inner side. The inner side is the surface to which paint is applied. Before the leafstalk can be used for this purpose the rough outer surface must be cut away until the entire length of the 'bark' is no more than two to three millimetres thick. This is done with a long-bladed bush knife or steel-bladed adze. Thinning the leafstalk enables it to be flattened without splitting. The bark still has a good deal of spring in it, however, and before it can be used for a painting it must permanently flattened. Two techniques are used. One involves placing the bark under weights for several days, smooth side down; ideally this done after it has been submerged in a forest stream or pool for a week or two to help break down the fibres. A faster, but less satisfactory, technique involves wedging the slab of bark, smooth side out, against a post. One end is wedged under a protuberance on the post, such as a knot or a large nail,

15 A painting on a spathe can easily be distinguished from one produced on material cut from the sago-palm leafstalk by examining its back; the former is ribbed and shows no signs of having been cut or thinned with a blade; the latter always bears the marks of the outer surface of the leafstalk having been cut away with a knife or adze. For more general accounts of bark painting techniques in the Sepik see Kelm 1966-68, vol. 3, pp.17-18; see also Kaufmann 1979.

Figure 3.2. Naniyas of Awonow clan, Bangwis, holding a green leafstalk cut from a sago palm he has just felled, 1982.

Figure 3.3. Naniyas of Awonow clan holding a thinned sheet of bark cut from a dry sago-palm leafstalk showing the smooth side on which artists paint, 1982.

the centre is pushed inwards until the sheet becomes slightly concave longitudinally, and the other end is held in position on the ground with a heavy stone or log. Left overnight this produces a roughly flat surface suitable for painting but one with a slight banana-like bend in it longitudinally.[16]

Once a bark has been flattened the two shorter sides (henceforth 'ends') are normally trimmed with an adze to make them roughly parallel (Figure 3.6). This results in a flat surface which has the form of a trapezium: a four-sided figure two sides of which, the ends, are parallel. The two long sides (henceforth 'sides') are normally left untrimmed. Being formed from the natural edges of the leafstalk these converge slightly towards one end, since the leafstalk itself tapers. A typical sheet of bark so formed measures about a metre in length, 50 cm wide at its wider end, and 30 cm wide at its narrower end.

Kwoma artists paint both on single sheets of bark so formed and on larger surfaces made from two sheets that have been stitched together. In Tok Pisin Kwoma refer to the former as a 'single bark' (*singel panggal*) and the latter as a 'double bark' (*dabol panggal*). When making a double bark the wider end of one sheet is normally attached to the narrower end of the other, producing a more strictly rectangular picture surface. Occasionally the two wider ends will be stitched together, creating a trapezoid surface similar to that of a single bark. On rectangular (in contrast to trapezoid) double barks the join of the two component sections runs diagonally across the centre of the picture surface, perpendicular neither to the two ends nor the sides. In the case of a trapezium-shaped double bark the join is perpendicular to the two ends.

I raise this technical point about the angle of the join on a double bark since it has implications for the Kwoma painting style. Artists commonly use the join on a double bark as the central long axis of a design. In the case of rectangular barks – where the join runs diagonally across the picture surface – this commonly has the effect of transforming a design characterised by vertical reflection symmetry (see Chapter 5) into one which is strictly

16 In Tok Pisin, both a bark and a finished painting are referred to as *panggal* (or *pangal*; see Mihalic 1971:148).

Figure 3.4. Tuwundimi of Nowil clan and his young son Willy Apen pulverising the fibrous core of a sago palm preparatory to leaching the edible starch out of the pith, 1973. Two dry sago-palm leafstalks of the kind from which artists obtain the material for painting can be seen in the background on the left side of the photograph, one of which has been set on a frame for use as a trough in which pulverised sago pith can be 'washed'.

Figure 3.5. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis, using an adze to thin a flattened sheet of sago-palm leafstalk, 1982.

Figure 3.6. Wachongg trimming the end of a 'double' bark before using it for a painting, 1982.

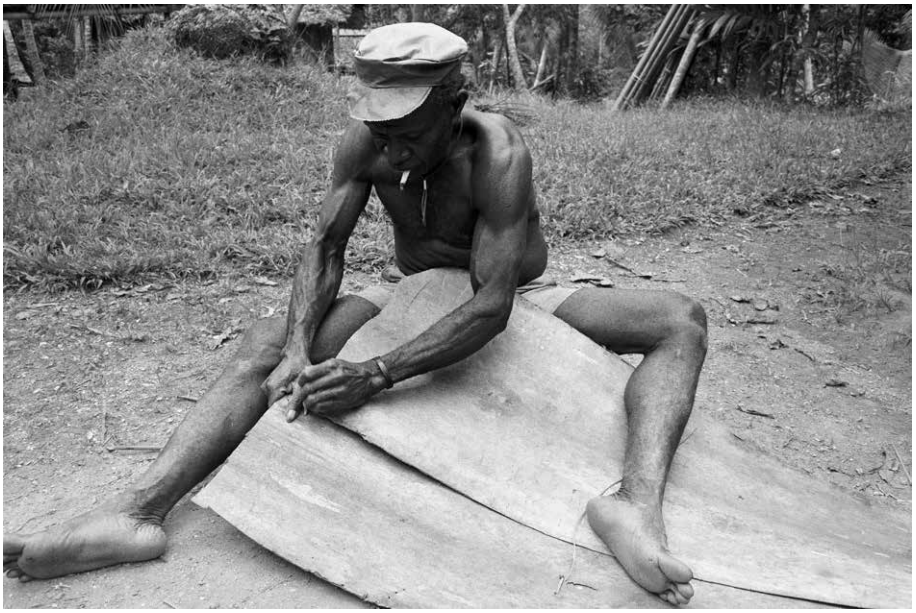

Figure 3.7. Wachongg stitching two 'single' barks together to make a 'double' bark, 1982.

asymmetrical. The underlying design in such a painting is still notionally symmetrical since the two halves of the bark contain the same number and types of motifs in the same relative positions. But because the central long axis runs diagonally across the picture surface, rather than parallel to the two sides, the symmetrically opposed motifs typically differ greatly in size. The asymmetrical 'twist' which Kwoma artists give otherwise symmetrical designs in this way is one of the most distinctive features of Kwoma paintings stylistically.

When two 'single' sheets are stitched together to make a double bark they are overlapped by about four to five centimetres (Figures 3.7-3.8). Several pairs of holes are punched through the overlapping sections at different points along the join and the two sheets then stitched together with lengths of split rattan. The ends of the ties are knotted at the back of the bark (Figure 3.8). The instrument customarily used to punch the holes is a sharpened flying fox wing bone; this is struck with a mallet made from any suitably heavy object ready to hand, even a piece of smouldering firewood from a kitchen hearth. Different men use different techniques for stitching the two halves of a double bark together. Some tie each join with a separate length of split rattan; others prefer to thread a single piece artfully down the entire length of the join. The great majority of the paintings illustrated in this book, like those on the ceiling of a men's house, are double barks.

Artists

In the Washkuk Hills only men produce bark paintings. This forms part of the division of labour between the sexes in this society. Although all men are entitled to paint not all do. Of those that do, not all are equally skilled. The most skilled are referred to by a variety of honorific terms that can be loosely translated as 'master artist'. One such term, as already noted, is *woyi siipiikwina neeki tawa yikapwa*, literally 'a brush- and adze-holding boy'. The use of the term 'boy' for such a prominent man is typical of Kwoma humour. Another

Figure 3.8. Detail of the back of a 'double' bark. The photo shows the contrast between the thinned back and the natural edge of the sago-palm leafstalk, and one of the several knotted lengths of split rattan which hold the two sections of bark together.

term is *jebwa otii tawa ma*, 'a man who habitually makes designs (in paint or wood)'. Both expressions allude to the fact that the most skilled painters and carvers are those who are routinely seen with brushes or adzes in their hands in the act of painting or carving.

There are no full-time artists in this society. When they are not painting or carving, artists participate in the same social activities that other men undertake. Most of their time is spent processing sago (Figure 3.4) or gardening in the company of their wives and children.

Pigments

The pigments used on bark paintings, unlike those on ritual carvings (see below), are intended to be permanent and ideally retain their colour and brightness for the life of the ceremonial house in which they are displayed – about 20 to 30 years. Before commercial pigments became available Kwoma used only four colours in painting – two achromatic colours: black and white, and two chromatic: yellow and red. The great majority of painted designs are still produced with these four colours alone.

The indigenous black, white and yellow paints derive from earth pigments. The black derives from a clay usually found in the banks of forest streams. The term for black paint, and the clay from which it is derived, is *keyihapa now*; this literally means 'black earth' or 'black earth pigment' (*now*, earth, earth pigment). Black clay suitable for painting is not found in all parts of the Washkuk Hills and artists commonly obtain it, in exchange for betel nuts or other forest products, from members of other Kwoma tribes or from totemic kin or friends in Kaunga-speaking villages in the low-lying forest country to the north of the Washkuk Hills, where this clay is more abundant (Bowden 2023a). Unlike the three other

pigments used in painting, which can easily be broken up in the hand and mixed with water when required, the black clay dries into rock-hard lumps and must be soaked for a day or two in water before it can be used.

The yellow and white pigments derive from ochres. These occur throughout the Washkuk Hills and people typically find small deposits when digging holes for house posts or turning over ground in a new garden.

The traditional red paint has two sources: mineral and vegetable. Several closely related shades of red are obtained from different types of earths and soft rocks. The red of vegetable origin derives from the seeds of the Bixa orellana tree. The seeds are crushed in a palette and mixed with water. The two types of red paint can be used separately or combined. To ensure they have a ready source of red paint close at hand many artists grow Bixa trees next to their houses.[17]

The colour of yellow paint corresponds closely to that of yellow ochre. White paint has yellowish tinge when wet, like wet sago starch, but dries to form a bright, chalk-like white. Reds of both mineral and vegetable origin corresponds closely to what an English speaker would classify as burnt sienna. The black is jet black when wet but dries to form a dark grey.

The term for yellow paint is *bodiiwa now* ('yellow earth pigment') or, more briefly, *bodiiwa* ('yellow'). This probably derives from *bodi*, the name of several closely related varieties of tree (see Chapter 2) the mature fruit of which range from orange to red. The term for white is *nokunow*. '*Noku*' is the term for the sago palm. The term *nokunow* (literally 'sago-palm paint') no doubt alludes to the similarity in colour between white paint when wet, and the yellowy-white lumps of raw sago starch (*nokusobo*) that all families keep stored in clay pots in large quantities in their kitchens, and are the source of their staple food. This starch is described as 'white' (*nokunow*) in colour, like the white earth used in painting.

There are several terms for red paint. One is *nayi now*, literally 'red earth pigment', or, more briefly, *nayi* ('red'). Another is *siikiinow*, which literally means 'seed paint' (*siik*, seed + *now*, paint/colour), or 'paint of seed origin'; this alludes to the Bixa seeds that are one source of red paint. A third term for red paint, which similarly alludes to Bixa seeds, is *me now*, literally 'tree paint' (*me*, tree) or 'paint of tree origin'.

The term for the different pigments used in painting (mineral or vegetable), *now*, also serves as the noun 'paint' and the term for 'colour' in general. Paint of any colour deriving from an earth pigment can be referred to more specifically as *nowosapek now*, literally 'earth (or ground) pigment', or 'pigment made from earth' (*nowosap*, earth, ground, land). When speaking Tok Pisin, Kwoma use the term *graun* ('earth', 'soil', 'land') both for paint, whether of mineral or vegetable origin, and the earth pigments from which the majority of paints derive.

Kwoma lack indigenous blues and greens suitable for use in designs on bark. Women obtain a dark blue from the seeds of the *keyisiiniip* tree which they use to dye the bark twine used for net bags. In the 1970s they were also using typist's carbon paper.[18] Neither of these blues, however, is used in designs on bark.

---

17 The Bixa tree is not native to New Guinea but, like the sweet potato and tobacco, derives from tropical America. John Whiting (1970:187) reports that it was introduced to the Sepik by German colonists before the First World War. He refers to the Bixa tree (using my orthography) as '*nowa*', his spelling of the terms for the nouns 'paint' and 'colour'.

18 Carbon paper is wrapped around a length of bark twine and rubbed up and down several times until all the carbon has rubbed off. This imparts a rich dark blue colour to the twine which women say is just as durable as the blue they obtain from *keyisiiniip* seeds.

An indigenous green is occasionally used in designs on portable sculptures, such as secret ritual figures when these were still in use. This is made by grating the green outer layer off freshly cut lengths of bamboo and sprinkling the powder on to a ground of wet breadfruit tree sap, which acts as a glue. Green pigment so obtained keeps its bright colour for about 48 hours but then rapidly fades. In ritual contexts this was of no consequence since the figures were displayed for no more than 24 to 36 hours at any one time and were completely repainted each time they were displayed. But the transience of the green makes it unsuitable for use on barks. Artists nevertheless enjoy experimenting with colours and one of the barks I collected has two patches of green on it – now badly faded – made from the grated skin of green bamboo. Significantly, this bark was made for sale, not for display in a men's house.

Two potential sources of bright and durable colours that could be used in designs on bark are feathers and fur. Men make extensive use of feathers and fur when decorating themselves and, formerly, on ritual figures, but never incorporate them into designs on bark.

Today artists readily use commercial pigments when painting on bark. The most popular are oil-based house paints (see the examples in Chapters 9 and 10). Synthetic pigments are valued for three things: they offer a greater range of colours than the indigenous pigments, especially bright blues and greens; they are brighter (more reflective); and they are more durable. Even today, however, few village artists have much in the way of cash income and out of necessity rather than choice they still primarily use indigenous pigments in their paintings.

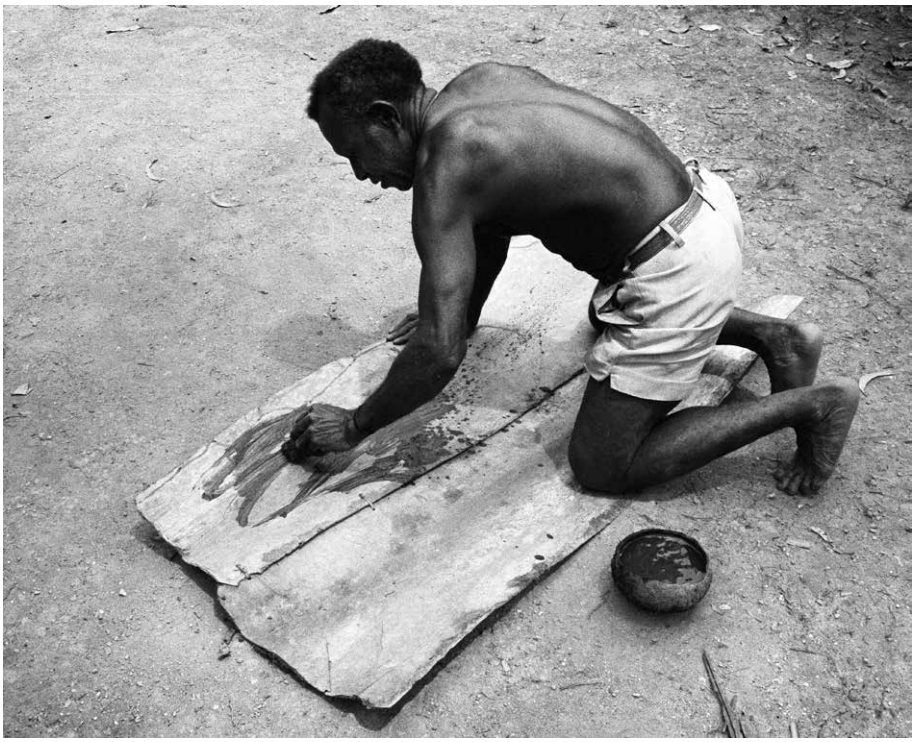

Figure 3.9. The artist Wachongg applying the black clay undercoat to a bark, 1982.

Figure 3.10. Wachongg working on his painting of a monitor lizard, 1982. The artist is left-handed but no stigma is attached to this fact.

Colour classification

The terms Kwoma use for the four colours traditionally used in paintings on bark – black, white, red and yellow – form their basic colour categories (Berlin and Kay 1969; Hardin and Maffi 1997; Stanlaw 1997). 'Basic colour categories' here refers to the terms people use most consistently when classifying colours. These are also the terms that 'classify out' the different colours people recognise. For Kwoma, that is, there is no colour that cannot be described accurately (among other ways) as either 'black', 'white', 'yellow' or 'red'. Significantly, there are no primary colour terms for blue or green. Blues and greens, depending on their relative lightness and saturation, are equated terminologically either with black, white or yellow. Dark blues and dark greens are classified as 'black' (*keyihapa*); richly saturated blues and greens as 'yellow' (*bodiiwa*); and light blues and greens as 'white' (*nokunow*). Many indigenous languages lack basic colour categories for blue and green (Hardin and Maffi 1997), but the Kwoma practice of equating richly saturated blues and greens with richly saturated yellow – a practice also found elsewhere in the Sepik – appears to be unusual in cross-cultural terms (Kay et al. 1997:30, 33).[19]

In addition to their four basic colour categories Kwoma employ a variety of descriptive circumlocutions and metaphors to describe particular colours, especially if they do not correspond closely to one or other of the four pigments used on paintings. For instance, a richly saturated brown, normally described as 'black', might alternatively be described as *kwopa kwopa hechawa*, which literally means 'looks rotten' (*kwopa*, overripe, decaying).

19 Colour classification is an immensely complex subject; see, among others, Witkowski and Brown 1978; Wierzbicka 2008.

Figure 3.11. Wachongg's initial outline in white paint of a totemic monitor lizard (*gey*), 1982.

Figure 3.12. An early stage in Wachongg's painting of a *gey* lizard, 1982.

Figure 3.13. A later stage in Wachongg's painting of a *gey* lizard, 1982.

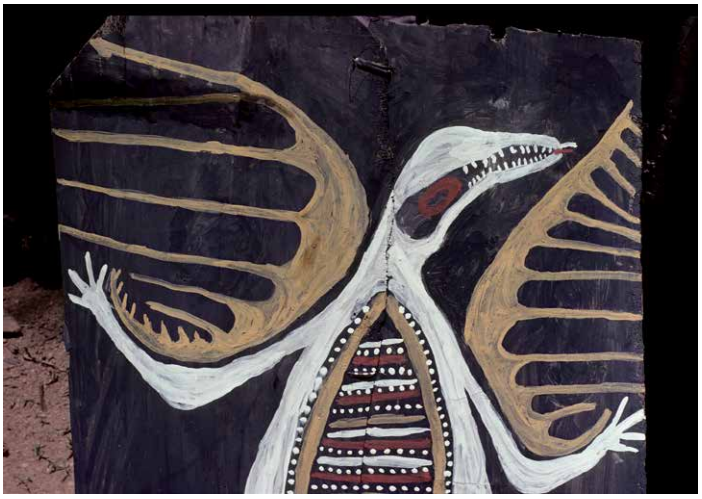

Figure 3.14. Detail of Wachongg's representation a *gey* lizard showing changes made halfway through the painting to the upper half of the design (cf. Figure 3.13), 1982. The artist has removed the four circular motifs he initially placed next to the animal's head, replacing them with two large *wariigey* (scroll-like) motifs, and also altered the shape of the lizard's snout.

A secondary colour term commonly used for richly saturated blues and greens (as well as some yellows) is ***neekiirii***, which means 'cold' – as in the case of cold water or the coolness of a shady place. The use of a term meaning 'cold' for blues and greens is noteworthy since these two colours cross-culturally are commonly thought of as 'cold', in contrast to orange and red which are typically thought of as 'warm' colours (see Agoston 1979:21; Kay et al. 1997:21, 30, 33).

When classifying colours Kwoma place much greater emphasis than an English speaker on relative lightness rather than hue, that is, on whether an object is relatively light or dark rather than its colour in the conventional English sense of this term. One illustration of this is the fact that all relatively dark and light colours, regardless of hue,

Figure 3.15. Wachongg standing beside his completed painting of a *gey* lizard (centre) and two other barks, 1982. For additional information on the three barks see Figures 9.3, 9.9 and 10.15. The artist painted these barks for a collection of Kwoma art the author made in January 1982 for the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.

are classified either as 'black' (*keyihapa*) or 'white' (*nokunow*). Thus, 'black' includes dark red, dark green, dark blue, dark orange and dark yellow, as well as dark grey and black. 'White' likewise denotes such colours as light yellow, light red, light blue, light green and light brown, as well as light grey and white. The two chromatic colours used in painting: yellow and red, are distinguished from the two achromatic: black and white, only when they are richly saturated, i.e. when they contain a minimum of black or white.

Constructing a painting

Once a sheet of bark has been shaped and flattened the next step in making a painting involves smearing the whole of its smooth side with black clay (Figure 3.9). The clay undercoat serves two purposes. First, it forms a surface to which the other paints will adhere. Second, because the undercoat is never completely covered by other pigments it serves as one of the colours used in designs. Unlike the other pigments, the black clay is applied with a wad of fibre cut from the husk of a dry coconut. The others are applied with brushes (*siipiikwina*). Brushes are made from small bundles of chewed fibres of betel nut husks tied to short sticks (*giisa)*.[20]

Each pigment is mixed with water in a separate palette. Palettes are made from coconut-shell bowls. When not in use a brush is left standing in its palette. If a man works on a painting over two or more days the palettes he uses rapidly dry out, often with the brushes standing in them. To resume work all he need do is add a little water to each palette and

20 Both men and women chew betel nut (*Areca catechu*) as an everyday stimulant. The nut can be chewed on its own or mixed with powdered lime made from burnt and pulverised freshwater shells and the catkin (flowering spike) of the betel pepper vine (*Piper betle)*.

break up the dry pigment with a stick, or the handle of a spare brush. There is no limit to the number of times a palette, or brush, can be used.

Painting is done with the bark lying flat on the ground, rough side down. For the artist's comfort, and to prevent the bark from warping in the sun, the work is carried out in shade, such as on the earth floor under a raised dwelling, or under a lean-to. Men say that painting places a great strain on the back and in the course of the work they frequently take short breaks. This gives them time to roll a cigarette, chew betel nut, contemplate their work, or even undertake odd-jobs around their houses. While working on a design the artist periodically turns the bark around to get access to its different sides, or physically moves around it.

Before any white, red or yellow pigment is applied a painter normally outlines the major entity to be depicted in clear water. This is applied with a brush. Using clear water enables the painter to determine whether the intended design will fit on the bark, and gives him an opportunity to assess its overall appearance. Once applied, pigments are difficult to erase and outlining a design in water helps reduce the risk of making serious mistakes, and hence the need for corrections. If he is satisfied with the outline the artist then quickly traces over the watery line with the other colours, usually white or yellow first. If he is not satisfied with the initial design, he will wait a few minutes for the watery line to evaporate in the intense tropical heat and start again.

Experienced painters like to work with a full brush. This enables long lines to be painted without a break. Ideally each line should also be smooth-sided and of regular width. Because he works with a full brush an artist needs to take great care not to drop paint on the picture surface while transferring it from the palette to the bark. Drops of paint cannot easily be removed and are condemned as an unsightly defect.

When the outline of the major motif has been completed the details are filled in. Typically an artist will work on different parts of a design simultaneously rather than completing one section of a painting before moving to another. One feature of Kwoma paintings stylistically is that white, red and yellow pigments are never painted over each other, but only over the black undercoat. Features such as cross-hatching, therefore, are not found in Kwoma designs.

Occasionally a man will decide halfway through a painting that he is dissatisfied with some aspect of the design and change it. Figures 3.13 and 3.14 illustrate changes Wachongg made while working on his painting of a lizard. (This painting is also discussed in Chapter 9.) Initially he drew the animal's head with a rounded snout and surrounded it with four yellow circles. But when he was halfway through the painting he decided that he was unhappy with both the shape of the snout and the yellow circles, and wiped them away with a wad of wet coconut-fibre. In doing so, he wiped away the corresponding areas of black undercoat, exposing the smooth brown surface of the underlying bark. Before he could repaint the head, therefore, he had to give the exposed areas of bark a fresh layer of black undercoat. When this had dried he repainted the lizard's head with a pointed snout. He also replaced the four yellow circles with large yellow scroll forms. The design was completed with the addition of a horizontal band in white across the top of the bark adjacent to the animal's head, and other non-representational motifs (see Figures 3.15 and 9.9).

As noted in Chapter 2, each painting typically has one major subject. This is represented either by a single motif positioned centrally on the bark (as in Wachongg's representation

of a lizard) or by two or more identical motifs distributed symmetrically over the picture surface. Normally, but not always, the areas of unpainted black ground around the major motif are embellished with smaller motifs. These might depict other entities or be non-representational. Common non-representational motifs are dotted lines, and the Greek key or scroll form. The latter typically are placed around the outer edges of a bark where they frame the other motifs.

The term for stippled, or dotted, line is *asachi*, or simply *asa*. *Asa* is also the term for dog, and *chi* the term for bite or sting. No one has ever explicitly said so, but the use of the term *asachi* ('dog bites') for rows of dots might well be an allusion to the similarity in appearance between a row of painted dots and the marks a dog leaves on something it has sunk its teeth into, or the small circular marks stinging insects, such as mosquitos, leave on the skin.

The black clay used for the undercoat or ground, although glossy when wet, has a dull, matt surface when dry. The final act in painting always involves applying varnish to the larger areas of exposed undercoat. This transforms the undercoat's dull grey colour into a glistening, highly reflective jet black. The varnish consists of the sap (*pi*) of the *sogwiyaw* tree, which is probably a type of indigenous rubber. This tree grows throughout the Washkuk Hills and the sap is tapped, like rubber, through an incision in the bark. The sap rapidly dries and becomes unusable when exposed to air and is tapped only when required. It is collected and stored in a bamboo tube with a leaf stopper. When used, a small quantity is poured into a large green leaf which the artist holds cupped in one hand, or into a half-coconut shell palette, then applied with a brush.

Like the latex of a rubber tree, *sogwiyaw* sap is white and opaque when wet but dries to form a translucent, highly reflective skin on the surface to which it has been applied. Dried varnish is insoluble in water and unlike pigments cannot be wiped off a painting, or easily painted over since the other pigments do not adhere well to it. Great care, therefore, must be taken when applying varnish to a finished design. If it is applied too thickly and runs over an area of white, yellow or red pigment it leaves a dark, indelible stain which, all agree, seriously disfigures a design. Different artists apply varnish in different ways. Some brush it lightly over the larger unpainted areas of black ground; others apply it thickly to every area of exposed black.

Because paintings are displayed on the ceilings of ceremonial houses they are designed to be seen from a distance, often from many metres away. Artists place great emphasis in designs, therefore, not on fineness of detail or on subtle variations in colour but on clarity of form, bold contrasts in tone (light and dark areas) and bright, richly saturated colours.

In the Washkuk Hills, the technique used for painting on bark is identical to that used for painting designs on sculptures – both the brightly coloured figures on permanent display in men's houses and (formerly) secret ritual figures. Like the barks, the sculptures on permanent display in a men's house are painted only once – when the building is being constructed. Ritual figures, in contrast, were repainted each time they were exhibited. When a ritual figure was repainted (Bowden 1983a, Plates 13-15) it was first scrubbed with a wad of crushed banana stem to remove any dirt and loose flakes of paint. It was then given a fresh layer of black undercoat (see the illustrations in Bowden 1983a) which completely obliterated the old design. A new design, often quite different from the older one, was then painted in white, yellow and red. Once

the new design had been completed varnish was applied to the larger areas of exposed undercoat in the same way as on a bark painting. Ritual figures that have been displayed many times are covered with multiple layers of black undercoat and other pigments. In theory it should be possible to determine how often a figure had been displayed ritually by counting the layers of black undercoat.

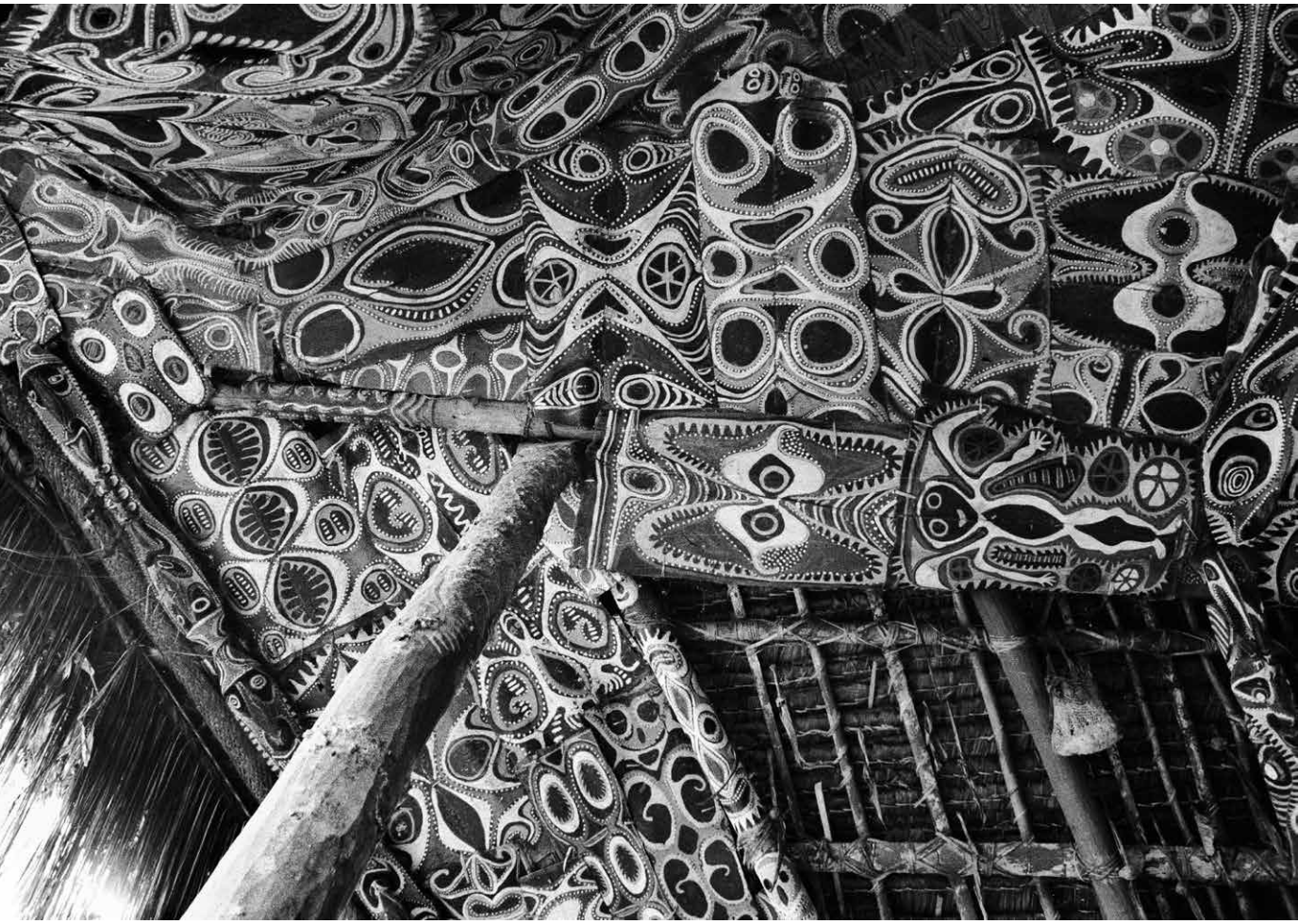

Figure 4.1. Bark paintings in Wayipanal men's house, front right side of ceiling, 1973.

4

The Elements of Design

Design elements

The designs Kwoma artists paint on bark are typically constructed out of a small number of visual forms or design elements. Design elements consist of such shapes as circles, ovals, semicircles, arcs, short straight lines and wavy lines. The most common are illustrated below (Figure 4.2; cf. Boas 1955:106; Munn 1973; Korn 1978).

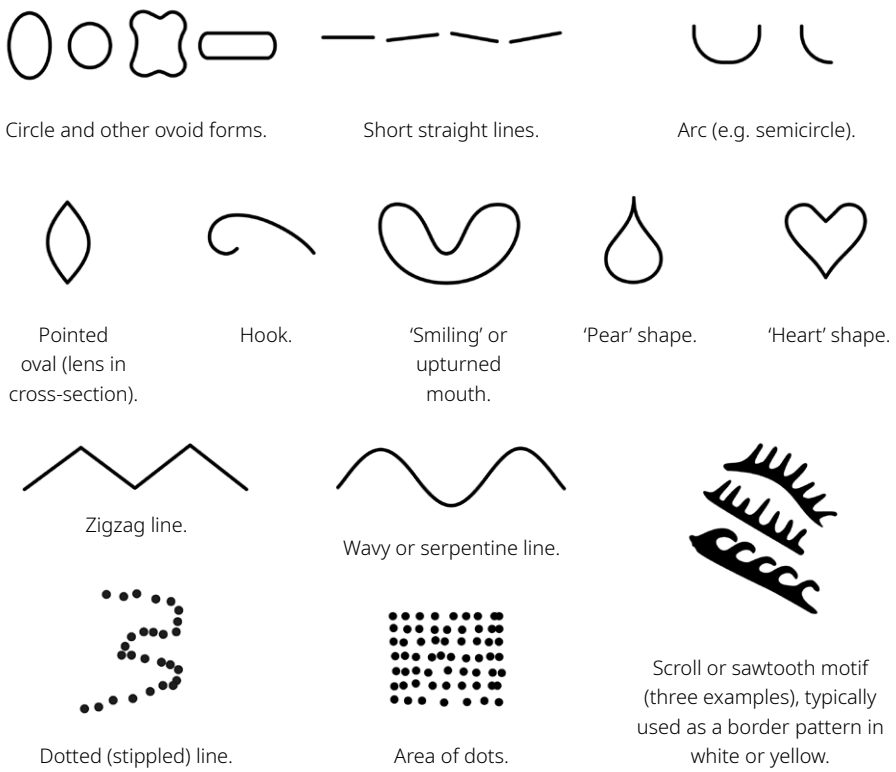
Circle and other ovoid forms.
Short straight lines.
Arc (e.g. semicircle).
Pointed oval (lens in cross-section).
Hook.
'Smiling' or upturned mouth.
'Pear' shape.
'Heart' shape.
Zigzag line.
Wavy or serpentine line.
Scroll or sawtooth motif (three examples), typically used as a border pattern in white or yellow.
Dotted (stippled) line.
Area of dots.

Figure 4.2. Common design elements used in Kwoma paintings.

Figure 4.3. Complex motif composed of a wavy line, pointed oval and arc.

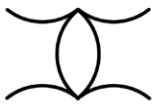

Figure 4.4. Complex motif composed of a pointed oval and arcs.

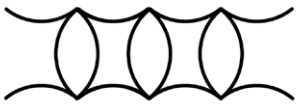

Figure 4.5. Horizontal band composed by replicating the motif illustrated in Figure 4.4.

Both individual design elements and the more complex motifs constructed out of them are termed *jebwa*. This term means 'intentionally made, meaningful mark', that is, a mark made deliberately to convey some information. The term *jebwa* can also be used outside the context of art for such things as a diagram scratched on the ground with a stick which is intended to indicate, say, the relative positions of two objects or the direction in which someone has travelled. Today, Kwoma also use this term for the letters of the alphabet and words which people inscribe when writing (cf. Sutton 1988:3).

More complex motifs

In paintings, design elements can be used individually to depict some object (e.g. a circle might represent the fruit of a particular tree) or in combination with other elements to create more complex visual forms. Both individual design elements and more complex motifs can be used representationally or non-representationally. Examples of motifs constructed out of two or more design elements that are commonly used representationally are illustrated in Figures 4.3 and 4.4. The first (Figure 4.3) makes use of three visual elements: the wavy

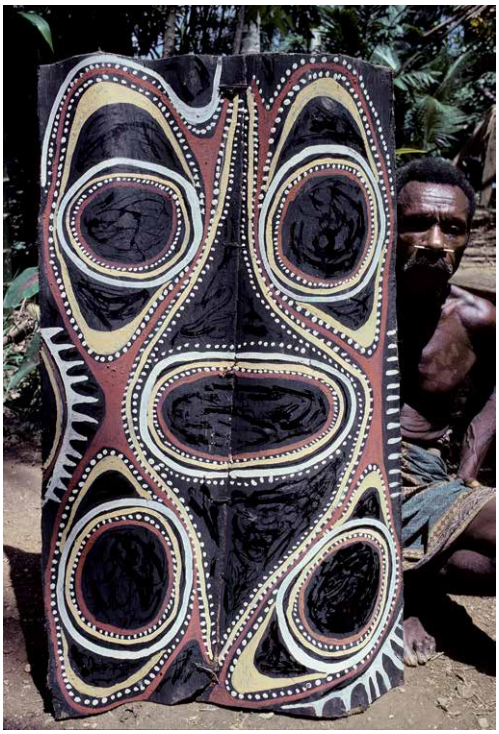

Figure 4.6. Manal Kapay of Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis, holding his painting of boulders in the northern half of the Washkuk Hills, 115 × 70 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery. The boulders depicted, along with an associated rock formation, are located on land the artist's clan owns. They are believed to be inhabited by a spirit named Awanggos.

line, the pointed oval and the arc. The second (Figure 4.4) is composed of two: the pointed oval and the arc.

In painted designs a motif such as the one illustrated in Figure 4.4 might be replicated laterally to form a band. Bands composed of such replicated motifs are also found in other areas of Kwoma graphic art, as in designs carved in low relief on wooden shields or incised on ceremonial clay food bowls. Such bands often form border decorations or serve to separate two areas or 'registers' of a larger design.

In the band illustrated in Figure 4.5, made by replicating laterally the motif illustrated in Figure 4.4, the adjacent motifs have been partially merged or 'concatenated' (De Boer 1990:88), since each shares a pair of arcs with the one next to it. The partial concatenating of motifs in designs is common in Kwoma graphic art.

Multivocality

One important point to be made about both individual design elements and the more complex motifs constructed out of them (see Chapter 6) is that they are multivocal or polyvalent (Turner 1967:50; Firth 1975:190). That is, they can be used to depict not just one entity but potentially a wide range of unrelated entities. For instance, the motif composed out of a pointed oval and four arcs illustrated in Figure 4.4 might be used in one painting to represent a bird and in another a bat. In both cases the pointed oval would represent the animal's torso (its body minus head, wings and legs) and the arcs its wings.

A second important point is that multivocality in Kwoma graphic art relates only to the way visual forms are used in *different* visual contexts, such as different paintings or different parts of a single painting. In any one visual context, in contrast, a design element or more complex motif depicts one, and only one, entity. Thus, a circle might depict a coconut in one painting – or in one part of a painting – and a betel nut in another. But the circle cannot represent both a coconut and a betel nut simultaneously in the same visual context. In Kwoma graphic art, therefore, multivocality is of the so-called 'non-simultaneous' variety (Chari 1998:492). A motif is multivocal 'simultaneously' only if it potentially depicts two or more entities in the same visual context.

Non-simultaneous multivocality distinguishes Kwoma art stylistically from that of some other Pacific societies. For instance, in her account of the art of the Walbiri (= Warlpri) of Central Australia, Munn (1973) indicates that a single 'graph' (design element), such as a short straight line, might simultaneously represent – in the same visual context – a variety of entities, such as a hunter's spear, a kangaroo lying down and the track the hunter has taken. In Walbiri graphic art, that is, designs are often characterised by *simultaneity* of multiple meanings. Munn notes that this is especially true of men's ritual designs, where multivocality (of the simultaneous variety) is at its most complex.

Although a single design element or more complex motif in a Kwoma painting or other graphic design depicts only one entity in any one visual context that same motif might nevertheless *evoke* in the mind of a viewer numerous other entities. Thus, a painting depicting the fruit of the *bodi* tree might simultaneously evoke several myths in which these fruit are described (see Chapter 10). In Kwoma graphic design, therefore, even though a motif depicts only one entity in any one visual context it might nevertheless evoke a much wider range of entities *simultaneously*. However, saying that a motif can evoke in the mind of a viewer a wide range of entities in addition to the one depicted is a different matter from saying that Kwoma graphic art is characterised by simultaneity of multiple meanings,

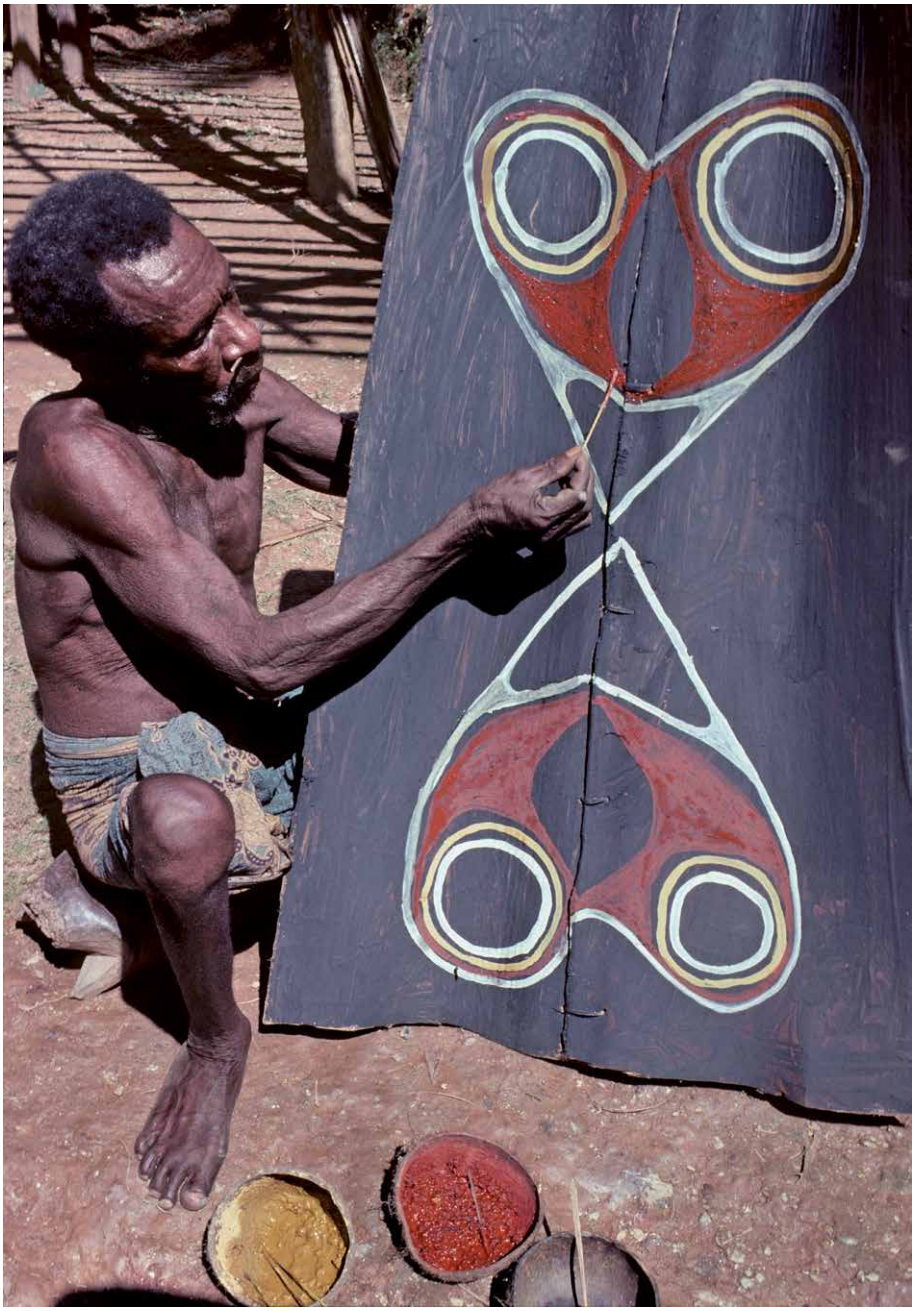

Figure 4.7. An early stage of Manal Kapay's painting of a sago grub (*ow*).

where 'meanings' refers to entities depicted. Simultaneity versus non-simultaneity of multiple meanings in designs are quite different things stylistically (Miller 1993:50-67).

One consequence of the fact that both individual design elements and more complex motifs potentially depict different entities in different visual contexts is that it is often not possible to say simply on the basis of the visual evidence what a design depicts (see

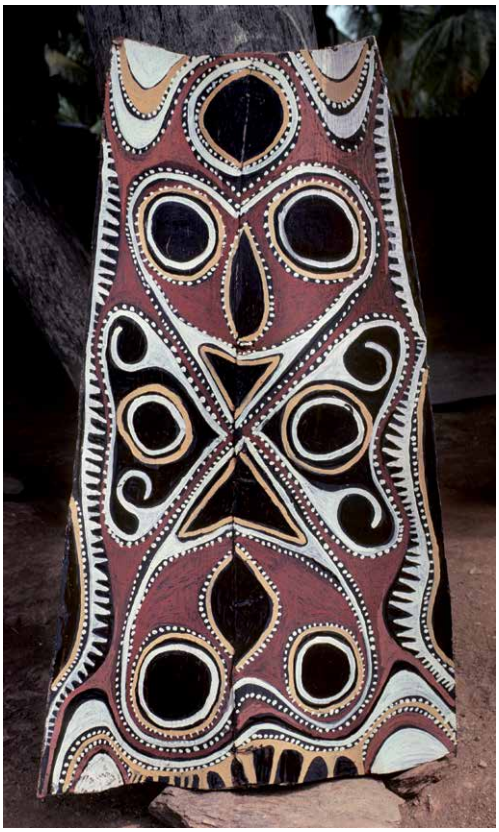

Figure 4.8. Manal Kapay's completed painting of a sago grub (*ow*) of the *ow kiitiikiit* variety, 120 × 45 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.

also Chapter 6). In the great majority of bark paintings determining what a design depicts depends crucially on knowing what the artist intended it to represent.

One indication that both the design elements and more complex visual forms in paintings are multivocal is that an artist might not decide what a painting represents until it is almost completed, or even not until it is finished. For instance, in January 1982 I had the opportunity to watch the master artist Manal Kapay work on his painting of a sago grub, illustrated in Figures 4.7 and 4.8. Kapay produced this bark over the course of two consecutive days, working for about two hours on each day.

The artist began (Figure 4.7) by outlining two large heart-shaped forms in white, one in the upper half of the bark and the other, in mirror reflection, in the lower half. Inside each of these forms he then added a pair of black roundels, a black pointed oval and a black triangular form, and painted the areas between them red. The design was still far from complete but assuming, unjustifiably as it turned out, that the artist already had a clear idea of what it was he intended to represent I asked him to identify its subject matter. He did not respond immediately. Instead, he put the brush he was holding back in its palette, leant back on the small wooden stool on which he was sitting, scrutinised the half-completed design for a few seconds, leant forward and swivelled the bark around as if to get a better view of it, and only then turned to me and said thoughtfully, 'I haven't decided yet.' He did not wish to be unhelpful, however, and after turning back to the bark and scrutinising it for another minute or two touched each of the motifs in turn and explained that the two large heart-shaped forms would represent the 'face' (*misoma*) of some entity, that the two pairs of

black roundels would represent its 'eyes' (*miyi*), the pointed ovals its 'nose' (*sumojii*) and the black triangles its 'mouth' (*kuja*). But as to the entity whose 'face' it would be, he said he had no idea. He added, 'It could be the face of a shooting star, a black millipede – or something else'. He then tactfully suggested that before asking him again I wait until the work was more advanced. Kwoma artists, it should be noted, are accustomed to having people watch them while they work and being asked to identify the objects they are depicting.

I returned to Kapay's house the following morning to watch him complete the painting (Figure 4.8). He had started work about an hour earlier to take advantage of the cool part of the day and when I arrived the design was almost finished. After sitting in silence for a while watching him work I again ventured to ask what the design depicted – to see what he said.

This time he lifted his brush from the bark, turned to me with a broad smile on his face and said that the painting depicted none of the entities he had mentioned the previous day. What it depicted was two stages in the life cycle of an edible grub (*ow*) of the type named *ow kiitiikiit*. This grub, he explained, is one of his clan totems and is prized as a food. It grows to about 10 cm or more in length and a centimetre or two in diameter and is eaten baked. It is typically found in the rotting trunks of felled sago palms, this palm also being one of the artist's clan totems. Having identified what the design as a whole represented Kapay now had no difficulty in specifying what its different parts depicted. The two heart-shaped forms that touch in the centre of the design, he said, represented the grub's 'face' (*misoma*) and the enclosed elements its 'eyes', 'nose' and 'mouth'. The large triangular forms on the two sides of the design, in contrast, represented the wings (*chepi*) of the moths (or beetles) into which these edible grubs transform at the end of their pupal stage. The concentric circles and pendant hook forms inside these triangular forms, he explained, were the decorative markings on the mature insect's wings.

The number of different entities a particular design element, or more complex motif, potentially depicts is effectively unlimited. In the 135 paintings on which this study is based, the circle is used, in different contexts, to depict at least seventeen different entities, and the hook motif at least nine. These are listed below.

Objects commonly depicted by circles*:*

1. coconut fruit,
2. *bodi* fruit,
3. eye (of animal, anthropomorphised 'inanimate' entity such as a shooting star, or spirit),
4. testicle (of animal),
5. waterlily seed,
6. spider's web,
7. navel (of animal),
8. stone (hearth stone or water-worn river stone),
9. boulder,
10. other spherical object (e.g. seedpod of certain trees),
11. stomach (of animal),
12. elkhorn fern,
13. full moon,
14. star,
15. head (of animal),
16. 'meaningless' decorative motif (i.e. a motif not intended to depict any particular entity),
17. betel nut fruit.

Objects commonly depicted by hook forms:

1. wing or leg of bird or other flying animal (e.g. flying fox or sugar glider),
2. barb or thorn on forest vine (including climbing palm),
3. leg of butterfly,
4. feeler of butterfly,
5. circular patch of colour on the wing of a butterfly,
6. vine (in garden or forest),
7. decorative motif around the eye of an animal,
8. stomach of bird,
9. cane grass (e.g. wild sugar cane) growing beside a river or lagoon.

Figure 5.1. Bark paintings at the front of Minjawolar men's house, Bangwis village, 1987.

5

The Kwoma Style

One of the most striking features of the Sepik River as an art area is the great variety of its local styles. The boundaries of these styles tend to coincide with those of the different languages, each of the Sepik's 200 or so language groups typically having its own style of painting and sculpture (Craig 1996a).[21] Sepik peoples themselves are well aware of these variations in local style and regard them as one of the ways in which the different cultures in this region vary. In addition to art styles and language these include the contrasting ecological zones people occupy (e.g. 'hill' versus 'river'), the foods eaten and how they are prepared, the types of rituals performed and the forms of domestic and ceremonial architecture.

The Kwoma term for an art style – whether their own or another – is *nobo* (pronounced 'nombo'), a term they also use for a 'culture' as a whole. This term literally means 'track' or 'path' and refers to the established and well-worn tracks that people follow when travelling through the forest, such as from one village to another or from a village to a lakeside market. More generally, the term is used for the distinctive 'ways' (*nobo*) in which the members of different language groups customarily behave, including the ways they paint and carve. When speaking Tok Pisin, Kwoma use terms such as *pasin* (from 'fashion') and *rot* (from 'road') with the same meanings. Each Sepik society, as they say, has its own 'way' or 'method' (*rot*) of doing things, including its own way of painting and carving.

Defining 'style'

The Kwoma belief that an art style, like a culture as a whole, represents a distinct 'way' (*nobo*) of doing things accords well with modern anthropological, archaeological and art historical understandings of this concept.[22] Thus, the archaeologist Hodder defines style in the context of art as 'a general way of doing' (Hodder 1990:45). Earle, another archaeologist, defines it as 'patterned variation in appearance' (Earle 1990:73). The art historian Elkins similarly defines style as 'a coherence of qualities in periods or peoples' (Elkins 1996:876). More complexly, but in the same vein, the art historian Davis (1990) offers a definition that echoes the modern philosophical notion of 'family resemblance' (e.g. Budd 1997:445; Harrison 1997). For Davis, a style consists of a 'polythetic set of similar but varying attributes in a group of artefacts … the

21 See also Schmitz 1956; Bühler 1960; Haberland and Schuster 1964; Kelm 1966-68; Schefold 1966.

22 The concept of culture has become the subject of a renewed debate in modern anthropology, some writers even rejecting it as a useful analytical category (see Rodseth 2018; cf. Lewis 2020).

Figure 5.2. Ceiling paintings in Wayipanal men's house, rear left corner, 1978.

presence of which can only be explained by the history of the artefacts … namely, common descent from an archaeologically identifiable artefact-production system in a particular state or states' (Davis 1990:19). For Davis, a group of artefacts is characterised by a 'polythetic' set of attributes if each artefact 'possesses a (large) number of the attributes of the group; … each attribute may be found in a (large) number of the artefacts in the group; and … no single attribute is found in every artefact in the group' (Davis 1990:19).

The best-known anthropological definition of style is probably still Schapiro's: 'constant form – and sometimes the constant elements, qualities and expressions – in the art of an individual or group' (1953:287).[23]

Of recent approaches to style one of the most productive is Sackett's (1990). Sackett proposes what he calls an isochrestic model, where 'isochrestic' means 'equivalent in use'. Sackett argues that a group of artworks (or other objects) sharing a common style can be viewed as the outcome of a complex set of choices which their producers make in the course of manufacturing them. He notes that even a relatively simple object such as an undecorated clay pot is the outcome of a complex set of choices, conscious or otherwise; these relate to such matters as the type of clay to be used, the thickness of the vessel's walls and the intended final shape. Sackett contends that the range of possible choices open to the producer of even a relatively simple artefact such as an undecorated clay pot is potentially so large that it is highly unlikely that two unrelated, or distantly related, peoples would produce objects in an identical style. For Sackett, an archaeologist, this entails that the degree of similarity in style between the material products of two groups 'can be regarded as a direct expression of their ethnic relatedness' (1990:31).

If Sackett's phrase 'ethnic relatedness' is extended to include degree of social contact, not just descent from a common parent culture 'ethnically' or linguistically, the argument seems plausible. The Kwoma style of bark painting, for instance, displays many similarities to that of speakers of the Maio dialect of the Mayo language located at Maio and Yesan villages in the Yesan (= Yessan) Hills immediately to the south-west of the Washkuk range (see Map).[24] It shows many more similarities, in fact, that it does to that of speakers of the Nukuma dialect of Kwoma, whose villages are located to north and north-west of the Washkuk Hills (see Chapter 1). The many parallels between the painting styles of the Kwoma and Maio, despite the fact that these two groups speak different languages – languages that even belong to different families (Nukuma and Tama respectively; Laycock 1973:22, 24) – can be correlated with the fact that during the century or more immediately preceding European contact the Kwoma were in much closer contact physically and socially with these Maio-speaking peoples than they were with the different Kwoma-speaking Nukuma groups. In fact, during that period the peoples now located at Maio and Yesan villages actually lived in the Washkuk Hills cheek by jowl with the Kwoma, and even spoke Kwoma as a second language – a skill which many older members of these villages retained until recent times (see Bowden 1997:xviii-xxv). Social contact during this period included frequent

23 For other discussions of style see Elkin 1935; Adam 1950; Lang 1979; Hodder 1982; Wiessner 1983, 1990; Washburn and Crowe 1988:36-9; Anderson 1990:262-84; Conkey and Hastorf 1990; Blocker 1994:303-4; Gell 1998:155ff.; Douven 1999; Billings 2015. Many anthropologists, art historians and archaeologists have attempted to correlate a society's style in art with other aspects of its cultures. For Sepik examples see Craig and Roberts 2018; Hauser-Schäublin 2021. See also Fischer 1961; Silver 1979; Gombrich 1994:34ff; Washburn 1999:554-556; Abramson 2000; Washburn 2002; Bowden 2014.

24 'Yesan' (or 'Yessan') is properly pronounced 'Yasiyan'. The former are government spellings.

intermarriage and regular participation in each other's ceremonies. The Maio and Yesan peoples eventually abandoned the Washkuk Hills and moved to their present locations around the beginning of the twentieth century, shortly before first European contact.

The Nukuma art style, similarly, is much more like that of speakers of the Yau dialect of Mayo, whose villages are located a few kilometres to their west on another small northern tributary of the Sepik River. In fact, the art of these two groups is so similar that they can easily be confused. The many parallels between the art styles of these two groups can again be correlated with the fact that during the century or more before European contact the different Kwoma-speaking Nukuma groups were actually located substantially further to the north-west of their present sites in the region the Yau occupy. During that period social contact included frequent intermarriage and regular participation in each other's rituals, despite their differences in language (see also Bowden 2023a). In keeping with Sackett's model, therefore, the striking similarities between the painting styles of the Kwoma and Maio, like those of the Nukuma and the Yau, can be directly correlated with the close social ties that existed between these two groups during the century or more immediately preceding European settlement.

Following Sackett's isochrestic model, a comprehensive definition of the Kwoma style of painting on bark would involve specifying all of the choices artists customarily make in the course of producing a painting. These would include choices relating to such matters as the:

- type of bark used
- method of trimming the bark
- size and shape of the picture surface
- way different sheets of bark are stitched together to make larger picture surfaces
- type and range of pigments used
- method of applying paints
- subjects depicted
- types of design elements used
- structure of the design
- area of the picture surface to be covered with a design or left unpainted.

A comprehensive analysis of these choices would result in an algorithm (or formula) which would enable a Kwoma – or someone else, even a computer – to produce *new* paintings in what Kwoma themselves would regard as acceptable examples of *their* style. One attempt to undertake an analysis of a Sepik art style along these lines is Korn's formal, quasi-mathematical account of the rules Abelam artists purportedly followed when combining design elements to produce their distinctive 'Abelam'-style designs (Korn 1978).

Two senses of 'style'

One useful distinction which many archaeologists and art historians make is that between 'passive' and 'active' senses of style. The 'passive' sense refers to the way in which the members of a group passively, even subconsciously, reproduce an existing art style when they learn from more experienced members how to do things 'correctly', such as how to paint a design on bark or make a clay pot (see Chapter 8). This would be an example what Bourdieu refers to as 'habitus', the patterned ways in which people behave more or less automatically (Bourdieu 1984:166, 169). The 'active' sense refers to the way in which the members of a

group, however defined, consciously adopt a certain way or style of doing things for the purpose of marking themselves off as members of that group in contrast to other groups.

A Kwoma example of style in this active sense is the way the members of a clan (or cluster of contiguous clans in the same tribe) decorate their ceremonial house differently from those owned by other clans. They do this quite consciously to symbolise their status as a distinct social group. Earle characterises style in this 'active' sense as a 'medium of communication by which individuals and social groups define relationships and associations… Thus style acts as a critical prop in social drama[s] as it functions to form, maintain, and transfigure social relations' (Earle 1990:73; see also Hodder 1982:40; Sackett 1990:36). Wiessner uses 'style' in the same active sense when she defines it as 'formal variation in material culture that transmits information about personal and social identity' (1983:256), and again as 'a form of non-verbal communication through doing something in a certain way that communicates information about relative identity' (Wiessner 1990:107).

It is beyond the scope of this study to offer a comprehensive definition of the Kwoma style of painting on bark. Here the aim is simply to isolate some of the features which are characteristic of the style and which a comprehensive analysis would need to take into consideration. The discussion in the remainder of this chapter focuses on four features:

- the relative frequency of figurative versus non-figurative motifs
- the methods of representing objects
- the use or otherwise of perspective in designs, and
- the use of different forms of symmetry.

With regard to the last of these, symmetry is a major stylistic feature of both painted and carved designs in all Sepik societies. But symmetry takes different forms. When comprehensive analyses of the different local styles in this region are eventually undertaken it is highly likely that one of the crucial clues to understanding their diversity will be the different ways artists incorporate symmetry into designs (Craig 2007:377). In contrast to many other features often mentioned in the context of style in this region, such as the prevalence or otherwise of 'curvilinear' or 'beak' forms (e.g. Adam 1950; Schmitz 1956:107; Bühler 1960), symmetry has the advantage of being precisely definable, which means that the presence or absence of its different forms, subject to the qualifications noted below, can be tested for with reasonable objectivity.

Figurative versus non-figurative motifs

In Chapter 2 it was noted that one of the stylistic differences between the bark paintings on display in Kwoma men's houses and the sculptures that decorate the posts and beams of these buildings is that the former are largely non-figurative or 'abstract' whereas the latter are predominantly figurative. Whether a motif should be classed as figurative or non-figurative is not a simple matter. At the risk of oversimplification, an image can

Style	Number	Percentage
Non -figurative	114	84.5%
Figurative	21	15.5%
Total	135	100%

Table 5.1. Figurative versus non-figurative designs in 135 Kwoma paintings.

Figure 5.3. Manal Kapay of Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of water-worn river stones, 119.5 × 62.9 cm, 1982. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.411.

be considered 'figurative' if it bears a recognisable resemblance to the entity it depicts, regardless of whether that entity is real or imaginary.[25] Of the 135 barks on which this study is based only 21 at best, or 15% of the total, incorporate 'figurative' motifs (Table 5.1).

In the context of Kwoma painting it needs to be emphasised that 'non-figurative' (or 'abstract') is not the same as 'non-representational'. As noted in Chapter 2, all of the paintings on bark I documented depict at least one named entity, but relatively few are figurative. A second point is that the distinction I make here between figurative and non-figurative designs reflects my own perception of them and does not necessarily reflect the way Kwoma themselves view their paintings. Indeed, many designs that a European observer would classify as non-figurative Kwoma would view as figurative, and even as highly realistic representations of the objects they depict.

One illustration of this second point is provided by Manal Kapay's representation of water-worn rivers stones (Figure 5.3). Before the artist revealed what his painting depicted I took it to be non-figurative or, at best, a highly schematic representation of some entity. It soon emerged, however, that the artist himself saw the design as a highly realistic

25 'Resemblance' and 'representation' in the context of art are concepts of great complexity. For useful reviews of these concepts in the context of both the psychology of perception and art see Woodfield 1997 and Hursthouse 2000.

representation of the objects it depicts. This became apparent when I questioned him about the subjects of the different motifs.

I began by asking him what the large black roundel at the top of the design represented. He told me that this depicted the kind of smooth water-worn river stones that Kwoma find in mountain streams and use in sets of three as hearthstones around kitchen fires. Not wishing to assume anything about what the other motifs represented, I then asked him what the roundel in the middle depicted. He explained that this was another representation of the same type of water-worn river stone. When I put the same question to him for a third time in relation to the large roundel at the bottom of the design Kapay became a little exasperated, apparently having concluded that I was incapable of seeing the visual similarity between either the three roundels that form the central feature of the painting, or between these and the water-worn stones they depicted. To help me see these similarities he took a small roughly spherical stone that he found close to where we were sitting, put this on the ground at his feet and with a short stick deftly traced a line around it. Removing the stone he pointed emphatically first at the circular form he had drawn and then at the three roundels in the painting and asked, 'Now can you see why I depicted the stones in that way?' Kapay's response demonstrated two important things. First, it showed that in spite of significant differences in shape between the three black circular forms arranged in a column in the centre of the design, Kapay himself saw these motifs as identical for representational purposes, and as equivalent in form to the more literally circular shape he had drawn in the bare earth. Second, it demonstrated that a design which I had initially taken to be non-figurative, and even radically 'abstract', in the eyes of the artist himself was a visually faithful representation of the entity it depicted.[26]

Two modes of representation

In his pioneering book *Primitive Art*, Franz Boas contends that artists in 'primitive' societies characteristically employ one or other of two modes of representation in graphic designs. Boas does not name these so for convenience I will refer to them as the silhouette (or outline) and disarticulated modes respectively. In the silhouette mode, Boas contends, the artist:

> may endeavour to render the form of the object to be represented in forceful outline and subordinate all consideration of detail under the concept of the mass as a whole. He may even discard all details and cover the form with more or less fanciful decoration without losing the effect of realism of the general outline and of the distribution of surfaces and of masses (Boas 1955:69).

In the case of the disarticulated mode the artist:

> may endeavour to give a realistic representation of details and his work may consist of an assembly of these, with little regard to the form as a whole (p. 69).

---

26 Kapay's belief that the roundels in this painting were visually accurate representations of water-worn stones contradicts Boas's (1955:69) contention in *Primitive Art* that 'Neither primitive man nor the child believes that the design or the figure he produces is actually an accurate picture of the object to be represented.'

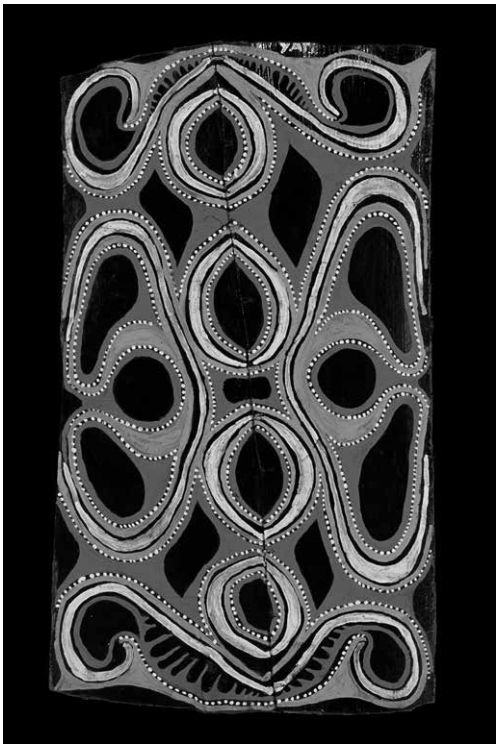

Figure 5.4. Yatiikapa of Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a 'spirit' python (*hopoma*) named Gawukumbu owned by the Tek totemic division, 120.5 × 69.2 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.428. For a colour illustration of this painting see Figure 10.13.

In both modes of representation, according to Boas, artists depict entities by means of 'characteristic' or 'permanent' features such as the distinctive shape of an animal's back (in the silhouette mode). In contrast to modern Western representations based on linear perspective neither mode restricts itself to depicting entities from one viewpoint only or at only one point in time. Both modes typically include features which in practice could only be seen from two or more viewpoints and at two or more times in the life cycle of the entity, or entities, depicted. For Boas, such representations are not less 'realistic' than those based on linear perspective, unless, as he says, 'the essence of realism' is equated with 'the reproduction of a single momentary visual image…' (1955:72). Boas's discussion of multidimensional modes of representation anticipates the contention by some modern philosophers and art historians that Cubist and other twentieth-century artists exploit a wider 'horizon' of possibilities to represent the 'character' of an object than those offered by linear perspective (Podro 1987).

The distinction Boas draws between the silhouette and disarticulated modes of representation applies well to Kwoma painting. It also corresponds closely to the one I have drawn here between figurative and non-figurative motifs. Contrary, however, to what Boas assumes in relation to the societies he discusses, Kwoma paintings do not illustrate just one of these two modes of representation but both, and often in the same work. Boas assumes that these two modes of representation characterise the art of different societies, or the art of a single society at different times in its history.

The 'silhouette' mode of representation is illustrated by Kapay's painting discussed above (Figure 5.3). In this work the water-worn river stones are depicted by means of

Figure 5.5. Meyimbor, Hipo clan, Bangwis, holding his bark painting of a winged stinging insect of the type named *wakatowa sama*, Tek totem, 110 × 70 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery. The insect is represented schematically, and only semi-figuratively, by means of its 'face' (*misoma*). This is shown twice, once in the upper half of the bark and once, in mirror reflection, in the lower half. The faces are oriented towards the ends of the bark. The two large black pointed ovals which touch in the centre are the insect's 'nose'; the two small curved 'mouth' motifs outlined in yellow its 'mouth'; and the pairs of white diagonal hook forms at the two ends its 'beard' (*teekibi*): hair-like fibres (possibly antennae) close to its mouth. The insect's two eyes are represented by the pair of small black roundels in the centre of the design. Both representations of the insect's face share the same pair of eyes; as such they are partially merged. This painting displays the three forms of symmetry found most commonly in Kwoma designs on bark: horizontal and vertical mirror reflection, and rotation (see Tables 5.2 and 5.3).

strongly delineated outlines. The 'disarticulated' mode of representation is illustrated by Yatiikapa's painting of a giant 'spirit' python named Gawukumbu illustrated in Figure 5.4. In this painting the animal is depicted not in outline but by means of several of its organs which have been disarticulated anatomically and, in Boas's words, reassembled 'with little regard to the [animal's] form as a whole' (Boas 1955:69). According to the artist, the four black pointed ovals arranged in a column in the centre of this painting depict, from the top, the animal's heart (*mesek*), lungs (*hiiriibu*), gallbladder (*wopu*), and kidneys

(*magiir wuwu siik*). The two large kidney-shaped forms on the two sides represent skin (*sapi*) which the animal has recently shed. The other motifs are non-representational.[27]

Perspective

A third characteristic feature of the Kwoma style of painting on bark is the complete absence of perspective, either linear or non-linear perspective (Bell 1996; Podro 1987). 'Perspective' refers to the way artists use different visual devices to create the illusion of spatial depth on a flat surface. Linear perspective, the principles of which were only fully worked out in the early fifteenth century in Europe (Kemp 1990; Bell 1996:486), creates the illusion of spatial depth by representing receding parallel lines as if they converge on a single focus or 'vanishing point'. Non-linear perspective (Bell 1996:492), which is widely exploited in both Western and non-Western art, creates the illusion of spatial depth by means of other 'depth cues', such as variation in the intensity of colours, variation in the clarity with which objects are depicted and through the use of shading (chiaroscuro). Thus, objects which are intended to be seen as closer to the viewer are characteristically depicted in stronger colours, with greater clarity, with more pronounced shading, as larger and often as partially obscuring other objects which are intended to be seen as further from the viewer. Since the Renaissance Western artists have typically used both linear and non-linear depth cues in the same work.

On the evidence of the paintings that form the basis of this study Kwoma artists make no use of perspective of any kind, either linear or non-linear. No object, for instance, ever partially obscures another to create the impression that it is in front of it; there is no variation in the intensity of the colours used to represent different objects in the same painting; and no use is made of such devices as shading (chiaroscuro) or foreshortening.

Symmetry

A fourth, and very prominent, feature of Kwoma paintings stylistically is the way they incorporate different forms of symmetry. Symmetry in a design is found whenever one part is repeated in a geometrically regular way (Washburn and Crowe 1988:14). Anthropologists writing about art typically equate symmetry with its bilateral form: the way in which a design can be divided vertically into two halves where each half 'mirrors' the other, or can be 'folded over' on to the other so that it (roughly) coincides with it. The two sides of the human body are often cited as an example. Bilateral symmetry, however, is only one of several types of symmetry and in a graphic design more than one might be found. This section first defines the four types of symmetry potentially found in 'planar' or two-dimensional figures and then documents the types found in the 135 paintings on which this study is based (see Tables 5.2 and 5.3). The analytical framework used here derives from

27 See also Kelm 1966-68, vol. 3:19ff. In his book *Primitive Art*, Boas takes the view that the representation of animals and other natural entities by means of 'characteristic' features is especially prominent in the art of pre-modern peoples (see also Sutton 1988:36). It should nevertheless be noted that the representation of natural species by means of characteristic or 'permanent' features also figures prominently in different areas of modern Western art, such as scientific illustrations. For instance, publishers of natural history handbooks prefer to use paintings or drawings rather than photographs of plant and animal species because these can be subtly manipulated to display the characteristic features on which people rely when identifying species in the field. In ornithological handbooks paintings and drawings of birds commonly highlight such features as the characteristic cock of the head, the angle of the wing, and the lie of the feathers – features which field naturalists acknowledge are very difficult to capture on film.

Figure 5.6. Manal Kapay of Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Bark painting depicting the leaves of the *kurij boga* plant, a type of wild taro with large heart-shaped green leaves, 100 × 65 cm (approx.), *c*1967. Photographed in situ in Wayipanal men's house, rear left side of ceiling, 1978. Like the bark illustrated in Figure 5.5, this painting displays the three forms of symmetry most commonly found in Kwoma paintings: vertical reflection, horizontal reflection, and rotation.

Washburn and Crowe's *Symmetries of culture: theory and practice of plane pattern analysis* (Washburn and Crowe 1988).

Washburn and Crowe (1988:44) note that 'planar' designs – including those on cylindrical or other curved surfaces, such as posts and bowls, which notionally can be 'laid out' on a flat surface – potentially display four types of symmetry. They classify these as (1) reflection (across a line in the plane), (2) rotation (about a point in the plane), (3) translation, and (4) glide reflection.

1. Reflection symmetry

A planar design 'admits' reflection symmetry if it can be bisected by a straight line and folded in two such that one half coincides with the other. The bisecting line is the axis of mirror reflection. Washburn and Crowe also refer to this as the 'reflection line', 'mirror line' or simply 'mirror'. For instance, the diagram illustrated in Figure 5.8 displays reflection symmetry across the long axis of mirror reflection A.

Figure 5.7. Wulasaka of Nowil clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a flying fox of the *gabarugween* variety, Tek totem, 130 × 60 cm (approx.), *c*1967. Photographed in situ in Wayipanal men's house, rear left side of ceiling, 1978. *Gabarugween* are one of the smallest of the furred flying animals that go under the general name *apokibi* (TP *blakbokis*). In the painting the animal is represented schematically, predominantly in yellow, twice on each side. The black pointed ovals in the centre of each of the four representations depict the animal's torso and the curved forms on the sides its wings. The other parts of the painting, the artist stated, are non-representational.

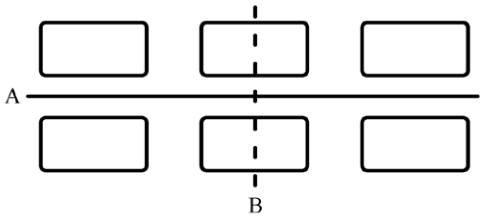

Figure 5.8. Mirror reflection across lines A and B.

A design can 'admit' reflection in more than one way simultaneously. Thus, in addition to reflection across the mirror line A the design in Figure 5.8 admits reflection across the mirror line B, which bisects the two central rectangles.

2. Rotation symmetry

A planar design possesses rotation symmetry if a copy of it (e.g. drawn on tracing paper) can be rotated around a central point such that the copy coincides with the original at some angle less than 360 degrees. If the copy needs to be rotated a full circle before it coincides with the original the design by definition lacks rotation symmetry. Figures that need to be rotated 180 degrees before they coincide with the original are characterised by 'twofold' rotation symmetry. If the copy only needs to be rotated 90 degrees it possesses 'fourfold' rotation symmetry, and so on.

If a design such as the one illustrated in Figure 5.8 possesses more than one axis of reflection simultaneously (e.g. vertical and horizontal reflection) it automatically also

Figure 5.9. Wulasaka, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a *wakan* plant of the *hoponokor* variety, Tek totem, 120 × 70 cm (approx.), *c*1967. Photographed in situ in Wayipanal men's house, front left side of ceiling, 1978. (This painting can also be seen in Figure 2.1.) The leaves of this plant are believed to contain magical properties (*keyapo*) and are fed mixed with food to dogs to make them effective hunters of game animals. Formerly they were also fed to young men, along with many other magical substances, during the now-defunct Handiipiya initiation ritual to makes them efficient hunters and gardeners. Formerly only ritual leaders grew this plant. Bangwis men reported that the *hoponokor wakan* plant is not indigenous to the Washkuk Hills but was obtained from the Kaunga-speaking people now located at Yelogu village when the latter migrated from more ancient sites further to the north into the region they now occupy in the nineteenth century, and first came into contact with the Kwoma (see Bowden 2023a).

Figure 5.10. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village, holding an example of the *wakan* plant depicted in the bark painting in Figure 5.9, 1982.

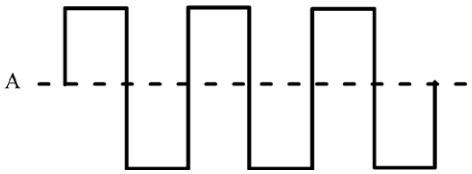

Figure 5.11. Meander line bisected by axis of glide reflection symmetry A.

possesses rotation symmetry, the centre of rotation being the point where the two reflection lines intersect. Thus, the diagram illustrated in Figure 5.8 is characterised by rotation symmetry as well as vertical and horizontal reflection.

3. Translation symmetry

'Translation' symmetry refers to the way in which a section of a design can be 'translated' or 'shifted' along a straight line so that it coincides at regular intervals with other sections of the same design (Washburn and Crowe 1988:20, 45, 48ff.). Translation symmetry characterises what are conventionally called patterns. In patterns, 'vectors' specify the distances and directions in which discrete motifs are regularly repeated along axes of translation.[28] In Figure 5.8, for example, the two rows of motifs could be extended indefinitely either or both to the left and right with the design retaining its existing three forms of symmetry. This design, therefore, is also characterised by translation symmetry.

4. Glide reflection symmetry

Washburn and Crowe define 'glide reflection' symmetry as a 'translation' or 'glide' that gives rise to a 'reflection in a line parallel to the direction of translation' (1988:50). Put another way, a design not currently admitting reflection is characterised by glide reflection symmetry if it can be bisected by a straight line and one half 'translated' or shifted a certain distance along that line such that a new design is created which does admit mirror reflection. Thus, the design composed of the meander line illustrated in Figure 5.11 possesses glide reflection symmetry since it can be bisected by a straight line – the axis of glide reflection A – and either the top or bottom half moved to the right or left along the axis to create a figure characterised by reflection symmetry. Washburn and Crowe report that of all the forms of symmetry found in planar designs glide reflection is the most difficult to recognise (1988:120ff.).

Before tabulating the different forms of symmetry found in the 135 paintings documented two general observations need to be made. First, few if any of the designs in Kwoma paintings are truly symmetrical in practice. One reason for this is that the barks themselves are not always regular geometrically. Another, as already mentioned, is that the vertical, or long, axis of many designs on 'double' barks does not run parallel to the two sides of the painting but follows the diagonal line of the join in the centre (e.g. Figures 5.6-5.7). Such paintings nevertheless notionally display vertical reflection symmetry (and possibly other types as well) since they can be divided into two halves by a straight line where each half can be seen to contain the same, or very similar, numbers and types of motifs in the same, or very similar, relative positions. In classifying the different forms of symmetry

28 In his discussion of symmetry in *Art and agency*, Gell (1998:73ff.) misleadingly equates pattern with symmetry. 'Pattern' is another word for translation symmetry and consequently refers to only one of the types of symmetry found in planar designs (see also Bowden 2004).

Figure 5.12. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a pumpkin plant, not totemic, 115 × 70 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery. In this painting the large black roundels in the four corners represent pumpkin fruit. The hook forms attached to the outer sides of the roundels depict the plant's vines. The large yellow V-shaped forms in the centre at both the top and bottom of the painting, with sawtooth decorations on their inner sides, depict the plant's showy yellow flowers. The pumpkin is an introduced plant and is not totemic. The fruit have become a popular food and are typically eaten baked or as an ingredient in soups. The tips of the vines are eaten as a green. The black ovoid form in the centre of the bark represents the elkhorn fern (*yibiika*). The two white hook forms attached to the inner side of the white outline depict the fern's large cabbage-like outer leaves (Figure 5.13). The elkhorn fern is an epiphyte which grows wild in the forest but people transplant specimens to posts outside their homes where they display them as decorative shrubs.

found in Kwoma bark paintings, therefore, it is these underlying or notional forms that are of interest, not whether a design is strictly symmetrical in practice.

A second point is that many otherwise symmetrical designs are rendered asymmetrical in practice because of the way details are painted. For instance, in the painting by Kapay depicting the pumpkin plant (Figure 5.12) the direction of the hook forms attached to the outer sides of the roundels in the four corners, and of the hook forms inside the central black oval, transforms an otherwise symmetrical design characterised by three forms of symmetry (vertical reflection, horizontal reflection and rotation) into one which is strictly asymmetrical. There can be no question that such asymmetrical features in otherwise symmetrical designs add greatly to the visual appeal of Kwoma paintings, but for the purposes of this analysis the majority of such features are ignored.

A final preliminary point is that the data presented below are limited to what Washburn and Crowe call symmetries in layout, or outline, rather than symmetries in colour (1988:57ff.). Colour can be analysed for symmetry but as Washburn and Crowe rightly note a design might be symmetrical in layout but not in colour and analysing the two together not only greatly complicates the analysis but also potentially obscures the symmetries in

Figure 5.13. An elkhorn fern (*yibiika*) growing on a post outside the painter Manal Kapay's house, Bangwis, 1982. This is the specimen depicted in the painting in Figure 5.12.

layout. In practice the great majority designs in Kwoma paintings are symmetrical in colour as well as layout but this analysis is concerned exclusively with layout.

Types of symmetry found in Kwoma paintings

Tables 5.2 and 5.3 summarise the types and frequencies of the different kinds of symmetry found in 135 paintings. From these it can be seen that vertical reflection is the most common type. This is found either on its own or in combination with other forms of symmetry in 116 (86%) of the total.

Because the majority of barks lack conventional tops and bottoms and therefore can be viewed from any angle it needs to be reiterated that 'vertical reflection symmetry' in this analysis refers to reflection across a straight line that runs parallel (or roughly parallel) to a bark's long sides. 'Horizontal reflection symmetry' refers to reflection across a straight line running parallel to a bark's two ends (the short sides).

Horizontal reflection symmetry occurs significantly less frequently than vertical reflection, being found in only 75 (56%) of the paintings. More common is rotation symmetry, found in 81 paintings. Strikingly, none of the paintings displayed horizontal reflection symmetry on its own (Table 5.3). Forty-two (32%) of the designs, on the other hand, displayed exclusively vertical reflection symmetry. Of the different types of symmetry found in these paintings, the least common is translation, which is found in only fifteen or 11% of the barks (Table 5.2). Glide reflection symmetry is found in Kwoma graphic designs but is relatively infrequent and does not occur in any of the 135 barks in the sample.[29]

29 Glide reflection symmetry is much more prominent in the art in some other parts of this region, as in designs on arrow shafts in the upper Sepik (Craig 1995; Craig and Roberts 2018).

Type of symmetry	No. of cases in 135 designs	Percentage of total designs
1. Vertical reflection	116	86%
2. Rotation	81	60%
3. Horizontal reflection	75	56%
4. Translation	15	11%
5. Glide reflection	0	0%

Table 5.2. Frequency of different types of symmetry in 135 Kwoma paintings

Combinations	No. of cases	Percentage of total
1. Vertical and horizontal reflection, and rotation	60	44%
2. Vertical reflection alone	42	32%
3. Vertical and horizontal reflection, rotation, and translation	14	10%
4. Asymmetrical	11	8%
5. Rotation alone	6	4%
6. Rotation and translation	1	1%
7. Horizontal reflection and translation	1	1%
8. Vertical reflection and translation	0	0%
9. Horizontal reflection alone	0	0%
10. Glide reflection	0	0%
Total	**135**	**100%**

Table 5.3. Types and combinations of symmetry found in 135 Kwoma bark paintings

Table 5.3 indicates that 60 (44%) of the paintings display three types of symmetry simultaneously: vertical reflection, horizontal reflection and rotation (e.g. Figure 5.5). Of the different types and possible combinations of symmetry this is by far the most common and therefore constitutes one of the distinctive features of Kwoma paintings on bark stylistically. Of the different possible types and combinations of symmetry, the second most common is vertical reflection symmetry on its own; this is found in 42 barks (32%). Together, these two types or combinations of symmetry account for 102 (76%) of the paintings analysed. Table 5.3 also indicates that 124 or 92% of the 135 paintings display one or more forms of symmetry. Only 11 (8% of the total) lack any form and hence are asymmetrical in style.

Figure 6.1. Bark paintings on the right side of the ceiling in Wayipanal men's house, 1978. The figurative representation of the *nokuyagaba* spirit in the lower right corner is also shown in Figure 6.11.

6

Shared Images. Shared Meanings?

Kwoma artists often imply that other members of their own communities are well informed about the subjects of their bark paintings and that if an outsider, such as a visitor from another tribe, wanted to determine what a particular painting in a men's house represented all he need do is ask any adult male member of the group that owns the building. In practice, things are not as simple as this. In the course of a survey I made of the bark paintings on display in five ceremonial houses in three villages I found that men were generally well informed about the subjects of the small minority of figurative designs, and consequently interpreted them in consistent ways. But there was no such uniformity of opinion about what the non-figurative designs represented, and when men were asked in private, without knowing what others had said, they often interpreted them in different and contradictory ways. This was true even of the way leading painters interpreted the work of other prominent artists in their own communities.

There are two reasons why viewers tend to agree about the interpretation of figurative designs but interpret non-figurative paintings in varying and contradictory ways. The first is that artists consistently use particular figurative motifs to represent the same types of entities (e.g. Figures 6.2-6.4). This was the case regardless of which clan or tribe the artist belonged to, and whether or not the artist's clan owned the entity depicted. Figurative designs, that is, tend to be univocal in that they are consistently used to depict the same types of entities in different visual contexts. Non-figurative designs in contrast are, without exception, multivocal. Like the design elements out of which they are composed, a non-figurative design can be used to depict a wide range of unrelated entities in different paintings. Kwoma themselves are well aware of this. In this society, however, the fact that non-figurative designs are multivocal does not mean that people see them as inherently ambiguous. In contrast to what is often said about the modern West, Kwoma do not take the view that 'anything goes' in the way non-figurative designs are interpretated, and that no one interpretative 'voice' is privileged over any other (Clifford and Marcus 1986:126; Clifford 1988:41; Miller 1993:10, 16). In this society, all people agree that there is one, and only one, 'correct' way of interpreting a painting, and that involves identifying its subject *as specified by the artist*. I found, however, that what artists have represented by non-figurative designs is often not widely known, and might not be known by many other members of their communities. The main reason for this is that

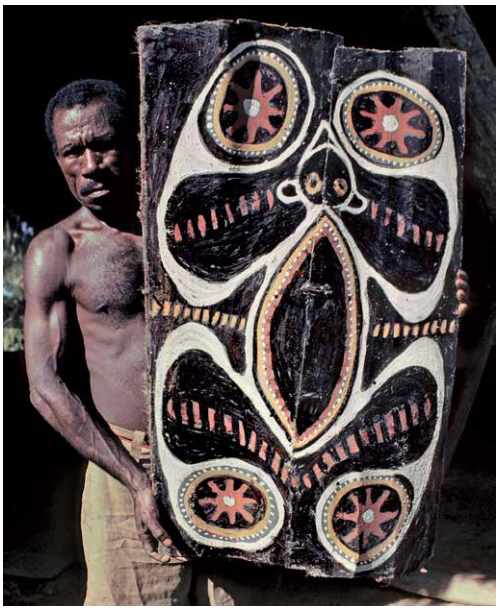

Figure 6.2. Meyimbor of Hipo clan, Bangwis, holding his bark painting of a flying fox (*apokibi*) of the type named *kwonoma*, Hamikwa totem, 110 × 80 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.

there is no formal or institutionalised mechanism for disseminating such information. When a ceremonial house is being constructed, the small group of senior painters and carvers who supervise the work inform themselves very carefully about the subjects of the paintings and sculptures that different men offer for inclusion in its decorative artwork. They do this in part to ensure that no entity has been represented illegally, and that displaying a representation of it will not give rise to a potentially serious dispute between them and the owners of the entity depicted, and even a demand that the painting (or other artwork) be removed. However, neither in the course of the construction of the building nor afterwards do these men, or the artists themselves, make any attempt to systematically instruct others about the subjects of the artworks on display. What others learn is acquired informally, principally by talking to the artists or men who claim to know what the artists depicted.[30]

Both the figurative and non-figurative designs that Kwoma artists reproduce in their paintings are common to all four Kwoma tribes. These designs, therefore, constitute a body of imagery shared throughout the Washkuk Hills. But the fact that people often do not know what artists intended to represent by non-figurative designs, together with the fact that non-figurative designs are multivocal, means that in practice many of the barks (and other artworks) on display in ceremonial houses are not the subject of shared understandings. This chapter illustrates each of these points in turn.[31]

---

30 A widely held but mistaken view in modern anthropology is that in 'oral' cultures the flow of information is more complete than in modern literate societies (e.g. Rowse 2000). In reality, the exact opposite is the case. In the course of my fieldwork I was constantly struck by how little individuals knew about what other people were doing in their own communities, and the number of institutional barriers there were to the free flow of information, especially between people of different ritual status. For instance, Kwoma women were never permitted to view or learn anything about the sculptures that men displayed in secret in rituals. This meant that half of the adult members of each community never saw its secret ritual art.

31 Similar observations could be made about the art of many other societies (e.g. Fernandez 1965; Gombrich 1996b:41-64).

Figure 6.3. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a flying fox (*apokibi*), Keyava totem, 120 × 80 cm (approx.), 1972.

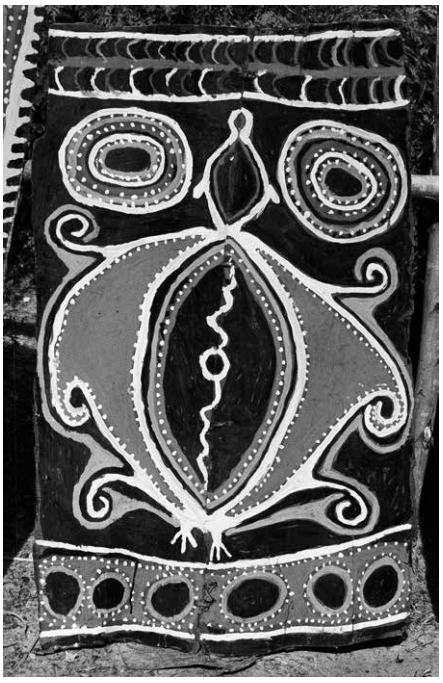

Figure 6.4. Mburunggay, Amachey clan, Melawei village. Bark painting of a flying fox (*apokibi*), Keyava totem, 110 × 65 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery. This painting is shown in colour in Figure 2.10.

Images which represent only one kind of entity and viewers consistently interpret in the same way

One motif artists consistently use to depict only one kind of entity, and which viewers invariably identify in the same way, is illustrated in Figure 6.2. This design, which has many variants (e.g. Figures 6.3 and 6.4), is exclusively used to depict flying foxes, the different types of which go under the general name *apokibi*. Because this design can be used to depict any of the several kinds of flying fox, the artist's testimony is always required if the particular type represented is to be identified accurately. But even without this knowledge a viewer could still confidently identify a painting of this design as a representation of this winged mammal. The design displays the animal dorsally (from the back) as if seen from above flying with its wings outstretched. It typically also shows its distinctive dog-like head with pointed ears and long snout, and its rear legs.

Variants of this design commonly also include the animal's male genitalia, an allusion, artists say, to the fact that this class of animals is grammatically 'male' (*ma*). They might also show the bat's claws protruding from the leading edges of its distinctively shaped curved wings. (The claws are the tips of greatly elongated fingers.) Many variants also display – X-ray style – the animal's intestinal tract (*sugu*), usually in the form of a serpentine white or yellow line running vertically (i.e. parallel to the bark's long axis) down the centre of its torso. Many paintings based on this design also depict the animal twice (e.g. Figure 6.3), once in the upper half of the bark and once, in mirror reflection, in the lower half.

Figure 6.5. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis, with his bark painting of a shooting star (*maway*), 105 × 50 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.

Another motif that artists consistently use to depict only one kind of entity, and which viewers invariably identify in the same way, is illustrated in Figure 6.5. This represents a shooting star (*maway*). As noted in Chapter 2, Kwoma believe that shooting stars are the souls of prominent men who have recently died flying through the night sky on their way to their final resting places in the underworld beneath one or other of the large lagoons

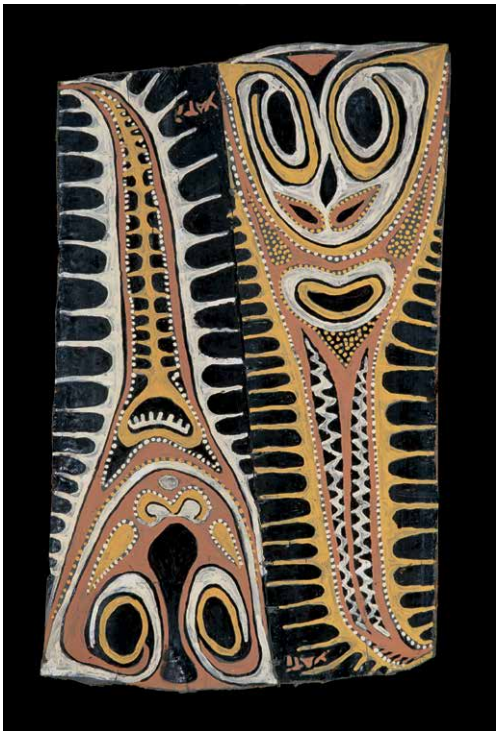

Figure 6.6. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a shooting star (*maway*), 106.4 × 68.7 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.423.

that flank the Washkuk Hills.[32] Flying souls are thought to take the form of the men they once were, and representations of them – as in the painting illustrated – typically give them prominent anthropomorphic faces. The faces possess a pair of large eyes, a nose and usually also a mouth. Flying souls are thought to light their journey through the night sky with a pair of burning coconut-frond torches which they carry tucked under their arms. It is these brightly burning torches, Kwoma say, that produce the streak of white light seen in the night sky when a meteorite falls to earth. Representations of shooting stars typically also show a long tapering V-shaped tail below the face. This is normally (though not always) identified by the artist as the streak of light seen in the night sky.

Multivocal designs: (i) similar designs depict different entities

Multivocality in designs is manifested in two ways. First, the same (or very similar) designs are used to depict very different entities; and second, very different designs are used to depict the same types of entities.

One example of a multivocal design is illustrated in Figure 6.6. This painting is composed of two identical images each of which has the same basic form as the one in Kapay's painting depicting a shooting star illustrated in Figure 6.5. In this case, one of the two images has been rotated 180 degrees to create a design characterised by rotation symmetry. Paintings based

32 In many societies the deaths of prominent people are thought to be marked by celestial signs. In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare attributes this belief to the ancient Romans when he has Calpurnia say: 'When beggars die, there are no comets seen;/ The heavens themselves blaze forth the deaths of princes' (Act 2, Scene 2, lines 30-31). See also Lévi-Strauss 1963:64.

Figure 6.7. Wakarap, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a tree frog (*giirisa*), Tek totem, 110 × 70 cm (approx.), *c*1967. Photographed in situ in Wayipanal men's house, rear left corner of ceiling, 1978.

on this double motif, where one half inverts the other, can be used to represent shooting stars, as indeed is the case in this painting by Yatiikapa. But it does not do so invariably, for it can also be used to represent a mythological figure owned by the Wanyi totemic division named Masembeyakapa (see Figure 11.9). Unlike the motif in Kapay's painting, therefore, this painted design is multivocal and its 'correct' interpretation requires knowing what the artist intended to represent by it.

Another example of the way a design can be used to depict very different entities is illustrated by the two paintings reproduced in Figures 6.7 and 6.8. Both paintings are based on the same basic motif. In each, the motif is shown twice: once in the upper half of the bark and once, in mirror reflection, in the lower half. The motif consists of two symmetrically opposed 'smiling mouth' forms separated by a pointed oval oriented at right-angles to them. In both paintings the overall design is characterised by the same three forms of symmetry: vertical reflection, horizontal reflection and rotation. In 1973 the author of the painting in Figure 6.7 stated that his design represented a tree frog (*giirisa*). In the painting the frog is depicted twice, once in each half of the design. It is depicted highly schematically and non-figuratively by means of two anatomical features which have been disarticulated. According to the artist, the two 'smiling mouth' motifs in each half of the painting are

Figure 6.8. Ambunyiki of Nowil clan, Bangwis, holding his bark painting of a shooting star (*maway*), not totemic, 130 × 95 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.

different representations of the animal's large mouth (*kuja*). The pointed oval depicts the frog's rotund belly (*bii*, alternatively *bii nedii*).

Ambunyiki, the painter of the second bark (Figure 6.8), described his design as a representation of a shooting star (*maway*) – the same entity as that depicted in the barks discussed above by Kapay (Figure 6.5) and Yatiikapa (Figure 6.6). The meteorite is represented twice, once in the upper half of the design and once in the lower half. In addition to the same basic set of motifs that Wakarap used in his bark to depict a tree frog (Figure 6.7), Ambunyiki's painting has a number of supplementary visual elements. These include small black roundels in the middle of each side and the white scroll motif (*wariigey*) around the outer edge of the design. This work also differs from Wakarap's in the colours used. In Wakarap's, blue, red and yellow commercial enamels have been combined with the indigenous black clay undercoat. In Ambunyiki's, only indigenous pigments have been used. In keeping with his assertion that his bark depicted a shooting star, Ambunyiki interpreted both the basic motifs and the supplementary visual elements anthropomorphically. He identified:

- the smiling mouth motifs at the two ends of the bark as representations of the deceased man's 'forehead' (*makabe*) – in Wakarap's painting (Figure 6.7) these same motifs represent the frog's prominent mouth,
- the two pointed ovals as the dead man's 'nose' – in the other these represent the frog's hugely distended belly,
- the pair of black roundels in the centre as the deceased's two 'eyes' (*miyi*) – there is no equivalent in the other bark, and
- the white scroll motif around the outer edge of the painting as the dead man's long ringlets or dreadlocks (*makapa*) – there is no equivalent in the Wakarap's design.

With reference to the last of these supplementary motifs, before intertribal warfare in this region came to an end (in the early 1950s) Kwoma men who had killed members of other tribes earned the right to wear their hair hanging down their backs in the form of long ringlets – or 'pencil-curls' as Whiting and Reed call them (Whiting and Reed 1938-39, Plates 2b and 4a). This hairstyle was limited to those who had killed in warfare and was an insignia of their high social status. Following the termination of intertribal warfare most of the leading warriors cut off their dreadlocks and began wearing their hair with short

back and sides, the fashionable style of the time. But many warriors kept their shorn locks and fashioned them into wigs which they donned during ceremonies as a sign of their pre-eminent social status. When these men died their sons inherited the wigs and today, although not formally entitled to do so under the traditional status system, they wear them as decorations during ceremonies. The artist's identification of the white scroll border motif in this painting as a representation of *makapa* ringlets is consistent, therefore, with the fact that shooting stars are thought to be the souls of men of the highest social status. All of these men by definition would have been outstanding warriors and hence entitled to wear their hair with long locks hanging down their backs.

Figures 6.9 and 6.10 show two other paintings by Ambunyiki based on the same basic design as that illustrated in Figure 6.8. These similarly depict shooting stars. In the first, a 'double' bark (Figure 6.9), the flying soul is depicted twice; in the second, a 'single' bark, it is shown three times.

Multivocal designs: (ii) different designs depict the same entities

In Kwoma bark paintings, multivocality is also illustrated by the way very different designs are used to depict the same type of entity. Two examples have already been given. For instance, Ambunyiki's painting illustrated in Figure 6.8 and Kapay's very different design reproduced in Figure 6.5 both depict shooting stars. Another example is provided by the two paintings illustrated in Figures 6.11 and 6.12. Both depict a type of forest spirit named *nokuyagaba*. In this case, one image (Figure 6.11) depicts the spirt figuratively with an anthropomorphic face and body, and the other non-figuratively – or at best only semi-figuratively. *Nokuyagaba* are diminutive forest spirits (*kwashek tawa sikiyawas*) that hide during the day in deep crevices in boulders and hollows in trees but roam about the forest at night in search of food. Their favourite food is said to be boiled sago (*nokugworo*) – the Kwoma staple – and in search of this they enter dwelling houses when the occupants are either asleep at night or away. Their preference for sago gives this class of spirits its name, which literally means 'sago-taking-ghost' (*noku*, sago; *ya*, take; *gaba*, ghost).

Wulasaka's painting (Figure 6.11) gives this spirit an anthropomorphic head and a human-like body with arms and legs. In keeping with the belief that these supernatural beings can fly the artist has also given it two pairs of wings (*chepi*), one attached to its shoulders and the other attached to its hips. Kapay's painting (Figure 6.12), in contrast, represents this supernatural being exclusively by means of a large stylised face. The face is reproduced twice, once in the upper half of the design and once, in mirror reflection, in the lower half. Both of the faces display a pair of large black eyes, a bulbous black nose and an open upturned mouth with a single row of teeth. According to the artist, the large black roundels between the two representations of the spirit's face represent deeply fissured boulders, one of the places in which these forest dwellers are thought to hide from view during the day. The other motifs in the painting are non-representational.

Examples of different interpretations of the same design

I noted at the beginning of this chapter that what artists represent in non-figurative paintings is often not widely known and that when other men are asked independently to identify the subjects of barks in ceremonial buildings they often contradict each other, and the artists' own testimony.

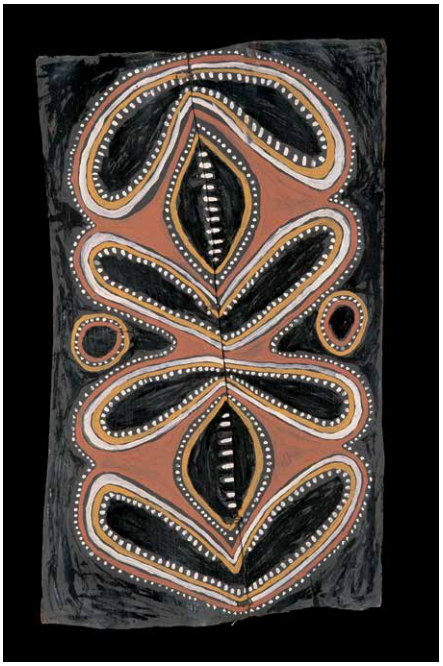

Figure 6.9. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a shooting star (*maway*), 132 × 78 cm, 1988.

Figure 6.10. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a shooting star (*maway*), 133 × 40 cm, 1988.

For instance, Wakarap, as already noted, identified the subject of his painting in Fig 6.7 as a tree frog (*giirisa*). The smiling mouth motifs, he claimed, are different representations of the animal's mouth and the pointed ovals different representations of its distended stomach. However, when I asked Wachongg of Nggiley clan (see Figure 10.14) of the same village to identify the subject of this painting he unhesitatingly identified it as a shooting star. In keeping with the Kwoma belief that shooting stars are flying souls, Wachongg interpreted the different parts of the design anthropomorphically. He asserted that the four smiling mouth motifs were different representations of the deceased man's 'mouth' (*kuja*), and that the two pointed ovals depicted his torso (*bii*; TP *bel*). Wachongg was unaware that his interpretation of this painting flatly contradicted that of the artist. However, it was consistent with the fact that this same design is frequently used to represent shooting stars, as the three paintings by Ambunyiki illustrate (Figures 6.8-6.10).

Figure 6.11. Wulasaka, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a forest spirit (*nokuyagaba*), Wayipanal men's house, right side of ceiling, 90 × 60 cm (approx.), *c*1967. Photo 1988. This same painting, photographed ten years earlier in 1978, can be seen in Figure 6.1. The photographs illustrate the decay that takes place in the paintings on display in a men's houses over time.

A second example of the way in which a viewer can interpret a multivocal design radically differently from the artist, when the artist's explanation is unknown or this information has been lost, is provided by the bark reproduced in Figure 6.13. This painting, by Wulasaka of Bangwis village, was photographed in situ in Wayipanal men's house. In 1972, Wulasaka identified his bark as a representation of the Sepik River when strong winds are blowing. The row of pointed ovals in the centre of the design, he said, depict the choppy, metre-high waves that form on the river when winds blow directly down one its long straight stretches. The white sawtooth motifs on the inner sides of these ovals show the yellowy-white foam that blows off the crests of breaking waves and scatters in ribbons across the surface of the water. The row of white hook forms on each side represents the tall grasses (*gubu*; TP *pitpit*) that grow in clumps along the edge of the river bending in the strong winds. Ten years later, in 1982, and some years after Wulasaka had died, the painter Manal Kapay confidently identified this painting as a representation of a type of green parrot named *apojin*, a totem, he claimed, of clans that belong to the Kowariyasi tribe. According to Kapay, the design depicts three of the bird's anatomical features: the four white hook forms arranged in a row on each side of the design are different representations of the bird's outstretched wings; the row of pointed ovals running along the central long axis correspond to its torso (*bii*); and the white sawtooth motif on the inner sides of these ovoid forms depict its intestinal tract (*sugu*).

Multivocality of designs in other Sepik societies

Multivocality is a feature not only of Kwoma graphic art but also that of most, if not all, other Sepik societies, even if it has not always been identified as such. Forge, for instance, is clearly referring to the same phenomenon when he reports that Abelam painters frequently refuse to identify what they are depicting until a design is completed. Abelam artists, he reports, typically 'start with a few of the forms of their two-dimensional "language" and see

Figure 6.12. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a forest spirit (*nokuyagaba*), 115.4 × 66.9 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.414. For a colour illustration of this painting see Chapter 10, Figure 10.29.

Figure 6.13. Wulasaka of Nowil clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of river waves (*uku ichu*), not totemic, 110 × 67 cm (approx.), *c*1967. Photographed in situ in Wayipanal men's house, rear left side of ceiling, 1978.

what it suggests' (Forge 1973b:177). Forge also reports that an artist might change his mind halfway through a painting about what the design depicts. Moreover, if two men have been working on the same painting they might even disagree about what it represents after it is finished (see also Forge 1966:29, 1970:289, 1973b:187-88).

Schuster's account of the bark paintings of the Iwam similarly indicates that multivocality is a feature of graphic design in this upper Sepik society (Schuster 1969). Schuster, however, attributes the contradictory ways in which different Iwam men often identified the subjects of designs to a breakdown in culture following European contact and the loss of what he assumes was once shared knowledge. More particularly, he attributes the contradictory accounts that different men gave him of what designs represented to:

- ignorance of which totems belong to which clans,
- loss of knowledge of what different motifs represent,
- a tendency for viewers to interpret motifs in isolation without reference to the wider visual context, even when the wider context makes the interpretation implausible (e.g. a zigzag line might be interpreted as a snake even though the larger design indicates that it represents the arms or legs of an anthropomorphic figure), and
- a tendency for people to assign referents to motifs regardless of whether or not artists intended them to be representational (1969:13-14).[33]

33 For additional information about Iwam art see Abramson 1976.

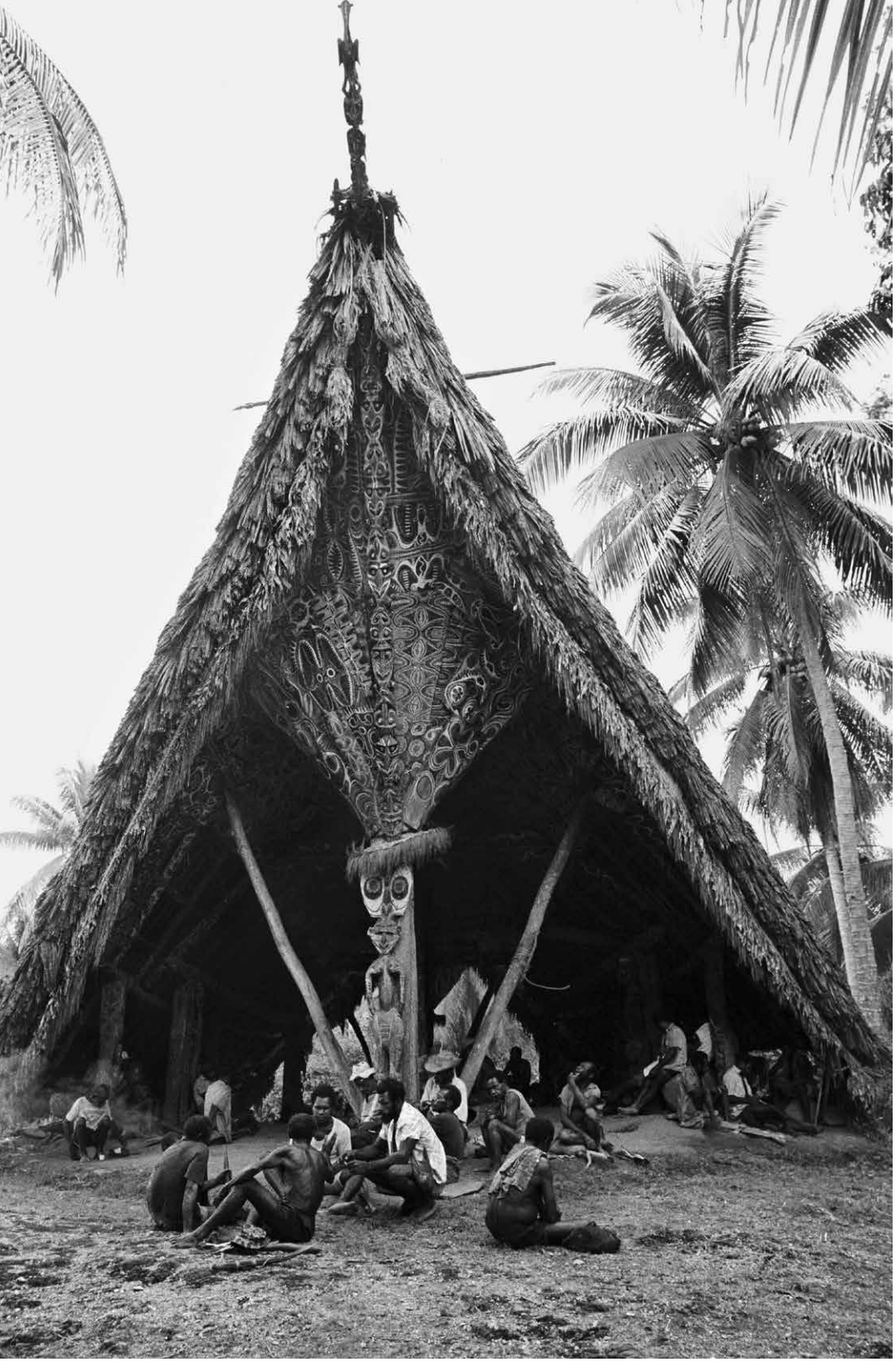

Figure 7.1. The front of Wayipanal men's house, Bangwis village, 1982. The men are participating in a village meeting.

7

Aesthetic Values and Artistic Creativity

A Kwoma men's house, including the hundreds of bark paintings and sculptures it contains, has a life expectancy of no more than about 25 years. At the end of that period the bark paintings and the polychrome designs on the sculptures will have faded and lost much of their visual impact (Figures 7.3 and 7.4), the thatch will have decayed to the point where it is letting in the rain, and the sculptures most exposed to the tropical weather at the two ends of the building, such as the ridgepole finials, will have begun to rot and might even have fallen off the building. Formerly, the life expectancy of these buildings was probably even shorter since the burning of ceremonial houses belonging to enemy villages, along with domestic dwellings, was a major objective in intertribal warfare (Bowden 2023a:142). Even today people still refer to attacks on enemy villages as attempts to 'burn' them.

In principle there is no reason why a ceremonial house should not stand indefinitely. The major uprights are cut from durable hardwoods which are effectively resistant to rot and termites, the roof periodically could be rethatched, and faded artworks could be retouched or even replaced. The convention in this society, however, is that once a building has been completed no major repairs may be made to it. Minor leaks in the thatch may be repaired; a slit-gong that proves to be defective may be replaced with one with a more far-reaching sound; and a sculpture that dislodges itself from a post or beam during an earth tremor may be fixed back in position. But at no time may a building undergo a complete renovation. This means that once the fabric of a men's house has seriously begun to decay the building will either be dismantled and a new one constructed on the same site or abandoned and a replacement built elsewhere – either in the same village or at a new settlement. The only artworks that are customarily preserved and transferred to a new building are two or three of the best slit-gongs, instruments that provide the musical accompaniment to singing during rituals and are used to send messages to people elsewhere in the same village or the surrounding forest. But if a new building is too far from the old one for these heavy instruments to be dragged to it, even they will be abandoned and allowed to decay along with the rest of the structure (see Whiting and Reed 1938-39, Figure 5B).

In 1994 the owners of Wayipanal, the oldest of the three men's houses in Bangwis village during my period of fieldwork, decided that this building had reached the end of its useful

Figure 7.2. The fan vault or 'wasp's nest' decorated with bark paintings at the front of Wayipanal men's house, Bangwis village, 1972. A similar fan vault covered with bark paintings was located at the rear of the building. This architectural feature is termed a 'wasp's nest' (*homaniikow aka*) because of its similarity in shape to the small conical nests constructed by a type of wasp that is a totem of the clans that owned this building. Such fan vaults are a copyrighted architectural feature of men's houses named Wayipanal. They are believed to replicate the fan vaults in the ceremonial house which the culture heroes Moyichey and Naliwen constructed, at the beginning of history, based on one they found by chance during a visit to the underworld in a village owned by spirits and ghosts of the dead (see also Figure 7.1; Bowden 2022:24-30).

life. Built 25 years earlier in the second half of the 1960s, the roof was in an advanced state of decay, the carved finial projecting from the front end of the ridgepole had rotted through at its base and fallen to the ground, and wasps had badly disfigured the bark paintings and carvings by plastering them with hundreds of small clay nests.[34] Rather than leave the building standing and construct a new one elsewhere in the village its owners decided to demolish it and rebuild on the same site. Bangwis is located on a steeply sided hill and, apart from its relatively flat top where Wayipanal stood, there are no other level sites close to the centre of the village equally suitable for the construction of a new men's house. Having made the decision to demolish it, the building was dismantled over several weeks and its

34 Clottes (2006) gives an illustration of the way wasp's nests can similarly disfigure art in rock shelters.

posts, beams, thatch and the bulk of its decorative artwork either taken to the forest and discarded or burnt. I did not witness this event myself but learned from the village's Local Government Councillor the following year that the only artworks preserved were the slit-gongs and a selection of carvings roughly hacked off the ends of beams by younger artists seeking models for future works or objects to sell to visiting art collectors. The slit-gongs were dragged to the dwelling houses of the men who individually owned them. There they were used for sending messages to people elsewhere in the same village or out working in the forest. Regrettably, none of the slit-gongs were securely protected from the weather and when I next visited the village, ten years later in 2006, all had badly decayed.[35]

Wayipanal was not the first men's house to be constructed in the centre of Bangwis following the founding of the village at the beginning of the 1940s, though it was the first to be fully decorated. Previously, two other men's houses of similar size had occupied the same location but neither had been elaborately decorated.[36]

From a Western perspective, the demolition of a masterpiece of vernacular architecture such as Wayipanal and the burning of its hundreds of bark paintings and sculptures was a disaster artistically and culturally. The modern Western view is that all works of art are unique and that the accidental loss or deliberate destruction of a masterpiece of painting, sculpture or architecture is a loss culturally both to the society that produced it and the wider artworld. One expression of this view was the outrage at the destruction of the 1500-year-old statues of Buddha at Bamiyan by the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001 – on the grounds that they were 'anti-Islamic' idols (Gamboni 2001:10-11). In the West, accordingly, every effort is made to preserve a great work of art no matter how decayed.

The destruction of Wayipanal and the burning of its paintings and other artwork also represented a major setback for the Papua New Guinea government's policy of preserving as much as possible of the country's indigenous cultural heritage (Papua New Guinea 1976; Craig 1996b), for this building was one of only a handful of fully decorated ceremonial houses remaining in the Sepik and one of the nation's few surviving examples of traditional architecture at its best. Technically, its demolition was also illegal, though its owners, to be fair to them, were not aware of this. Papua New Guinea's *National Cultural Property (Preservation) Act* of 1976 states that 'A person who, without lawful and reasonable excuse (proof of which is on him), wilfully destroys, damages or defaces any national cultural property, is guilty of an offence', the penalty for which is a fine not exceeding 200 kina (roughly 200 U.S. dollars at the time the law came into effect). According to the Act, 'national cultural property' consists of any object 'used for, or made or adapted for use for, any purpose connected with the traditional cultural life of any of the peoples of the country, past or present…'. The owners of Wayipanal were unaware that the demolition of the building was illegal because none was literate in English and had never heard of, let alone read, the *National Cultural Property Act*.

Although the demolition of a building such as Wayipanal from a Western perspective was a catastrophe artistically and culturally, Kwoma take a very different view. They believe that no work of art is unique aesthetically and that once a painting, sculpture or even a

35 A replacement men's house was eventually constructed on the same site but not for many years and was never decorated with paintings or sculptures.

36 Two photographs of the second, taken several years apart, can be found in Bowden 2022, Figure 3 (see also Haberland and Schuster 1964:89) and Bowden 2023a, Figure 10.2.

Figure 7.3. Bark painting depicting a flying fox (*apokibi*), Wayipanal men's house, 1978. The yellow and red paints used in this work were durable commercial enamels, but even so the painting had noticeably begun to decay after being on display for ten years.

Figure 7.4. The same painting as the one illustrated in Figure 7.3 in 1988, twenty years after it was first put on display. The bark is in an advanced state of decay. Six years after this photograph was taken the building was demolished and its bark paintings burnt.

fully decorated men's house has decayed to the point where it can no longer be used for the purpose for which it was made it can be discarded and replaced with a well-made, and authorised, copy *without loss artistically* to the community that owns it. For Kwoma, an artwork is lost only if the *idea* of it is lost and no one can remember how to recreate it. The same applies to rituals. A ritual is lost – as several have since European contact – only if no one can remember how to perform it. This includes remembering the songs that formed a central part of all ceremonies and the magical and other ritual procedures that should be followed. For Kwoma, that is, the essence of a bark painting or other artwork, like a ritual, is not a physical object (or performance) but an idea or mental blueprint which master painters, sculptors and other specialists periodically embody in physical form.[37]

Kwoma art based on supernatural prototypes

The Kwoma belief that a decaying painting, sculpture or even fully decorated ceremonial house can be replaced with a well-made (and authorised) copy without loss artistically or culturally to the community that owns it reflects their wider view that artworks are not the original intellectual products of creative human beings but are facsimiles of objects created by supernatural beings at the beginning of history. The spirits who created these objects, Kwoma believe, are the same as those who created their culture as a whole, including the moral laws that ideally guide people's behaviour and the knowledge that enables people to obtain food from the natural environment.

---

37 This view of art and culture is characteristic of indigenous societies cross-culturally and is also remarkably similar to that found in many pre-modern complex societies, such as ancient Egypt, classical India and medieval Europe (e.g. Baines 1996:792). It even finds expression in Plato's *Republic*. For Plato, the whole of a society's material and non-material culture, ranging from the different types of artefacts that people manufacture for everyday use, such as shoes and tables, to the moral values that ideally guide behaviour, are based on non-visible, unchanging archetypes which he calls Forms (e.g. Plato 1987:264). In Plato's view, artworks are manifestations of the Form of Beauty. Similarly, moral values are manifestations of the Form of Justice, or, at a higher level of abstraction, the Form of the Good (see Plato 1987:423). Like Kwoma, Plato believed that the prototypes or Forms on which a society's material and non-material culture is based are not of human creation but of supernatural origin. I discuss these topics in detail in *Art and creativity in a New Guinea society* (Bowden 2022:19-102; see also Bowden 2023a, 2023b).

The creation of many of the prototypes on which their art is based, along with the creation of all other major aspects of their culture, is described in myths. Individual myths are owned by particular different totemic groups but they are known (or at least were until recently) to all adult Kwoma regardless of their tribe or clan.

For instance, the well-known myth named 'The Song of Wale' (*Wale Yapo*) describes how the design for ceremonial houses that bear the name Wayipanal (Figure 7.1) derives from a building created by ghosts of the dead which two human brothers named Moyichey and Naliwen stumbled across when they were exploring the spirit world. Kwoma think of the spirit world as identical in appearance to the world in which humans live, but as being located just a few metres beneath it. Access to the underworld is gained through holes in the ground, including forest springs and especially deep sections of streams and lagoons.

The myth tells how Moyichey and Naliwen travel into the forest one day to shoot birds. They construct a blind close to a huge tree which is laden with fruit of a kind they know attracts birds, such as cassowaries and crowned pigeons. After constructing the blind they crawl inside, poke arrows through holes in the leaf wall, and wait for game to approach to feed on fallen fruit. Suddenly a powerful wind begins blowing and uproots the tall tree. A long line of spirits – ghosts of the dead – then emerge from the deep hole left in the ground by the tree's upturned roots and set off towards the two men's village. Unbeknown to the brothers an elderly woman in their village, named Wale, has just died and the ghosts have emerged from the underworld to collect her soul and take it back to their village in the land of the dead. The myth does not say so explicitly but listeners understand that it was the ghosts themselves who used their supernatural powers to cause the wind to blow and uproot the giant tree to create a hole through which they could enter the upperworld occupied by humans.

Figure 7.5. Sculpture at the front of Wayipanal men's house depicting the culture hero Moyichey, 1987.

When the ghosts have disappeared from view the brothers cautiously emerge from their hiding place, inspect the deep cavity from which the spirits emerged, and decide to investigate. They climb into the hole and soon find themselves in the underworld in a forested environment identical in appearance to that above ground. They follow a track and before long come across the village from which the ghosts derived. Hearing no voices they assume it is temporarily deserted and enter it. In the centre of the settlement they find a gigantic ceremonial house of a form that was quite unfamiliar to them. They walk inside its open front and gaze in astonishment at the hundreds of brightly coloured bark paintings on its ceiling and the polychrome sculptures on its posts and beams. So impressed are they by the building and its decorative artwork that they promptly decide to 'steal' its design and construct an exact replica in their own village in the land of the living. To this end they cut vines in the nearby forest and with these carefully measure the distances between the different posts. They then carefully commit to memory the forms of the different paintings and sculptures on display.

Several huge slit-gongs are distributed around the perimeter of the building's earth floor. They decide to test one. One of the brothers flicks the largest with a finger. Like the best instruments, they find that even when struck lightly the drum emits a deep far-carrying sound. As it happens this is heard by the ghosts of two old women sitting in front of their house nearby. Alarmed that intruders have entered their village's ceremonial house the women call to the unseen men to identify themselves. The brothers are equally surprised to discover that there are people in the village. They call out their names and announce that they are friendly visitors. Wanting to see who they are, the women invite them to come to their house and have something to eat. When the men arrive at their house the ghosts appear to them not in the form of frail elderly women but as beautiful unmarried girls. They tell the brothers their names, and the name of the building they had been inspecting: Wayipanal. While the brothers are eating the food they give them the two girls engage the visitors in flirtatious banter, a sign that they would be willing to marry them.

Later that day, the 'girls' suddenly advise the two brothers to leave and return home. They tell them that the other occupants of the village will soon be returning with the soul they have acquired in the land of the living and if they find them in the underworld will certainly kill them. The women tell the men to prepare themselves in case they encounter the ghosts before they have reached the upper world by arming themselves with a number of sticks and bundles of stinging nettles. The ghosts will be singing joyously at having obtained another soul to join them in the underworld. If the hear the ghosts approaching, the women tell the brothers, they must hide in the dense undergrowth beside the forest track. When the ghosts are passing the spot where they are hiding they must leap up, shout wildly, and pelt the ghosts with the sticks and stinging nettles they have collected. In their confusion, the women say, the ghosts will drop the soul they are carrying, along with a small net bag containing a magical stone adze blade, and run away. The brothers are to seize this net bag and take it back to their village. There, after hafting the blade to a new handle, they will be able to use the adze to construct without difficulty a copy of the men's house they have just inspected.

The brothers do as they have been directed. On their way back to the hole through which they descended into the underworld they collect sticks and stinging nettles. Suddenly they hear the ghosts approaching. They hide beside the track and at the appropriate moment leap up, shout wildly and hurl the sticks and stinging nettles at the passers-by. The dead

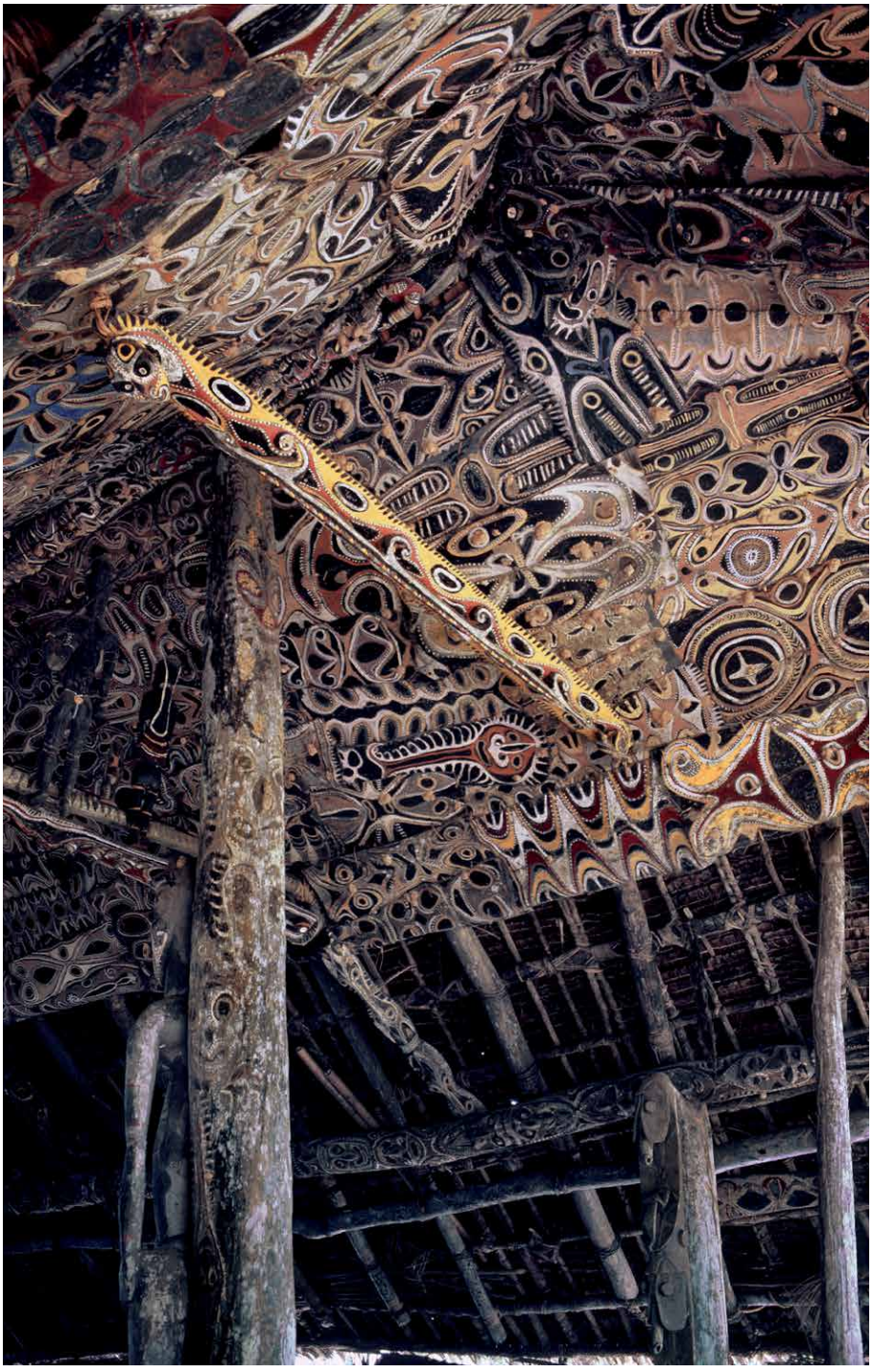

Figure 7.6. The interior of Wayipanal men's house viewed from the rear left corner, 1987. When this photograph was taken the building was 20 years old and nearing the end of its life. By this time, wasps had disfigured many of the paintings as well as the sculptures with their small clay nests, and the painted designs had lost their initial brilliance.

woman's soul is being carried by a pair of female conjoined twins draped over the bridge of flesh that connects their backs. The twins are also carrying the net bag that contains the magical adze blade. In their confusion the conjoined twins drop both the soul and the net bag, and along with the other ghosts scatter into the forest. The brothers quickly pick up the bag and set off for the hole that leads to the upper world, which they reach in safety.

Back in their own village the two brothers immediately set about constructing a replica of the building they saw in the underworld. They haft the adze blade to a new handle and use this to quickly fell the trees they need for the different posts and beams. After setting the posts and beams in position, and thatching the roof, they paint the hundreds of barks and carve the many sculptures required to decorate the new structure. When the building has been completed they give it the same name as the one they saw in the underworld and on which it is modelled. In commenting on the myth Kwoma say that this building becomes the prototype of all of the ceremonial houses constructed since then that have had the same name: Wayipanal. This includes the one that stood in the centre of Bangwis village until the middle of the 1990s.

The myth concludes by telling how Moyichey and Naliwen, after completing their new ceremonial house, turn their thoughts back to the two beautiful young women they met in the land of the dead. Being bachelors, they decide to return to the underworld to marry them. But the only way they can be sure of reaching the underworld is by dying. They decide therefore to kill each other by simultaneously driving fighting spears into the sides of each other's chests – for Kwoma the most vulnerable part of the body. Ironically, when the two brothers reach the underworld, this time permanently as ghosts, they discover that the two women they met there are not beautiful unmarried girls but wizened old widows who had only appeared to them in the guise of beautiful girls to lure them back to the underworld permanently as ghosts.

Most myths convey information of varying degrees of complexity about Kwoma culture and the moral values on which it is based. All Kwoma listeners to this myth, for instance, would understand that the deaths of the brothers Moyichey and Naliwen was the punishment the spirits exacted for their theft of the design of their ceremonial house and the construction of a replica of it in the land of the living. On a more abstract level, Kwoma acknowledge that the deaths of the two brothers was the price that humanity as a whole had to 'pay' (*toko*) for acquiring Culture (*nobo*) from the supernatural world in the form of knowledge of how to construct ceremonial houses of the type named Wayipanal.

The preservation of decaying artworks

The belief that their art and ceremonial architecture was not originated conceptually by humans but is modelled on prototypes created by spirits at the beginning of history underlies the radically different understanding that Kwoma have of art as a cultural phenomenon from that found in the modern West (Bowden 2022:19-70).

To reiterate a point already made, it explains why Kwoma make no effort to preserve decaying sculptures, paintings or ceremonial houses once they can no longer be used for their original purpose. For Kwoma, a building such as Wayipanal, like the bark paintings and sculptures it contains, is not the original creation of imaginative, unique human beings but merely a facsimile of an object of supernatural origin. Provided there are people with the knowledge and technical skill to construct a new replica of the same supernatural prototype, no purpose would be served by trying to preserve any one copy once it decays.

Given that Kwoma believe that all artworks replicate objects of supernatural origin and owe nothing creatively to the men who physically manufacture them, they also consider that there is no distinction in value artistically between an older facsimile of a particular supernatural prototype and its replacement, provided the replacement was made by an authorised person and with comparable skill. For the same reason, Kwoma make no distinction in value between the works of different painters or sculptors, provided their products are made equally skilfully, and the artists had the right to manufacture them. In this society, therefore, people have no compunction about demolishing a decaying masterpiece of vernacular architecture and destroying the paintings and carvings that decorated it, for they believe a new a copy of the supernatural prototype on which the building is based can easily be constructed. The same considerations applied to the sculptures that were displayed in men's secret rituals. When they decayed and became too fragile to be displayed they would be taken into the forest and allowed to rot. Today, if possible, they will always be sold to visiting art collectors (Bowden 2023b).

Artistic creativity

The belief that all of their art merely replicates entities of supernatural origin also explains why, in this society, artists are not attributed with *culturally significant* creativity. Kwoma take the view that no artist, however great by Western standards, contributes anything of cultural significance *of himself* to the works he produces. All an artist does, however skilled he might be, is replicate in paint, wood or other media objects of non-human origin. These are either objects that spirits created (such as men's houses) or the forms of the spirits themselves – the main subject of ritual sculptures.

In stating that Kwoma attribute no culturally significant creativity to artists I am not saying that people make no distinction between more competent and less competent painters and sculptors. They do make this distinction but they make it not on the basis of their relative creativity but on the basis of their technical skill. 'Technical skill' here refers to two things: (1) the range of a painter's or sculptor's knowledge of designs – the better artists by definition having a much more extensive knowledge of designs than the less competent, including designs owned by groups other than those to which they belong – and (2) the ability to make paintings and sculptures quickly and without making major mistakes.

In claiming that Kwoma attribute no culturally significant creativity to artists I am not arguing there is no creativity in art in this society, for there unquestionably is (see Bowden 2022:108-11). The leading painters, for instance, take great pride in never representing a totemic plant or animal in a design in exactly the same way twice. Thus, one painting might show an entity once and another two or more times. Different depictions of the same totemic entity, both by the same or different artists, also vary greatly in the number and kind of subsidiary motifs included, both representational and non-representational. Many of the leading artists, furthermore, have quite distinct personal styles of painting, something which Kwoma themselves recognise and identify as their different 'hands' (*tapa*) – the same term, incidentally, as that used by English speakers.

Periodically, the most active painters and sculptors undoubtedly also introduce genuinely new designs into their clans' repertoire of motifs. These consist of representations of objects that spirits have created (such as men's houses) or the forms of spirits themselves (e.g. Figure 7.7) of which artists become aware when they see supernatural beings in dreams or in images in forest pools and streams – the two mediums in which spirits most frequently

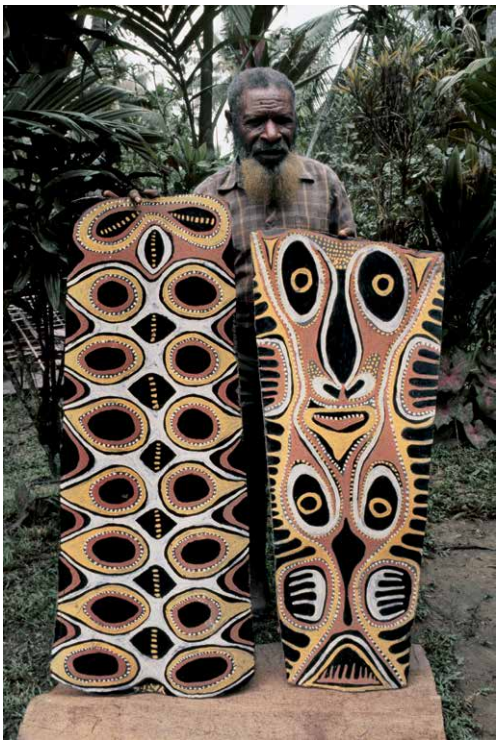

Figure 7.7. Yatiikapa of Yanggaraka clan holding two of his 'single' barks, 1988. Dimensions: (left) 120 × 50 cm; (right) 115 × 70 cm. The painting on the left depicts *bodi* fruit of the *yobo* ('tree kangaroo') variety. The one on the right depicts a female water spirit (*pa sikiyawas*) named Pinyowumangga. The artist reported that he saw this spirit in a dream a few weeks before making the painting. At the time he and his family were staying at an isolated forest dwelling he owned to the east of Bangwis village. He produced the painting, he said, to record the spirit's distinctive appearance which was hitherto unknown. The type of *bodi* fruit depicted in the painting on the left is owned by the Hamikwa totemic division; the water spirit is owned by the totemic division to which the artist's clan belongs.

reveal themselves to humans. The analytically important point, however, is that Kwoma do not regard such new designs as evidence of any special artistic creativity on the part of the men who produce them. In this society, all adults and children are believed periodically to see spirits as well as entities that spirits have produced in dreams or in the form of images in forest pools and streams. For Kwoma, what distinguishes outstanding painters and sculptors from others is that they have the technical skill, and the personal inclination, to transform experiences common to all people into the tangible form of paintings, sculptures and other artworks. Furthermore, this is precisely how artists themselves understand their artistic abilities.[38]

Aesthetic values

The belief that their paintings, sculptures and other artworks replicate objects of supernatural origin also explains why Kwoma subscribe to very different aesthetic values from those found in the modern West.[39] By 'aesthetic values' I mean the criteria people use in any society to judge the quality of art *as art*: that is, the value of a painting as a painting, or the value of a sculpture as a sculpture, and so on. In marked contrast to the Kwoma, modern Westerners do attribute humans with the capacity to make genuine and original discoveries about the world and to embody these discoveries either in the form of images (visual, acoustic, verbal, and so on) or arguments (verbal or mathematical). The former

38 Forge reports a very similar belief among the Abelam. He states that the Abelam do not see the artist as intellectually creative but as 'a technician whose chief virtue is his power to reproduce exactly the powerful patterns and designs used by the ancestors' (Forge 1967:80).

39 I have discussed modern Western aesthetic values in much greater detail in Bowden 2022:83-102.

constitute what in the modern West are customarily referred to as 'artworks'; the latter form the hypotheses advanced in the sciences and humanities. In keeping with this, in the modern West all artworks are judged *in practice* on the basis of two closely related criteria. These are the work's (1) conceptual originality, and (2) the effectiveness with which it reveals in new and plausible ways some aspect of the world: either the physical world, the social world, or both. In the case of artworks, 'originality' extends to every aspect of a work stylistically: the materials used, the subject depicted (if relevant), the colours and textures exploited, and so on. Thus, an historian might praise Rodin's sculpture *Crouching woman*, and by implication Rodin's greatness as an artist, for the way it depicts 'a position of arms, legs and head *that the entire* [Western] *tradition, from Egypt on, had missed*' (Bryson 1986; emphasis supplied). Similarly, a critic might praise the seventeenth-century painter Claude for the way he developed a 'new type of landscape drawing' and for being the 'originator of the accurate depiction of sunlight in landscape painting' (Kitson 1996:394, 401).

In the modern West, just as conceptual originality and the effectiveness with which it reveals some aspect of the world are the primary bases on which an artwork is judged positively, the less original a work is conceptually the less it is valued *as art* (i.e. aesthetically). To give only one of many possible examples, a modern English art critic dismissed the achievements of the seventeenth-century English painter Mary Beale with the following words: 'The most famous and prolific woman portrait painter of the 17th century, Mary Beale is… deservedly forgotten. Not an original idea in her head, not a lively stroke in her hand… [I]f you have ever looked at [Sir Peter] Lely's portraits you have seen everything before, and ten times more lively' (Sewell 1999).[40] In the modern West, works which make no claim to be original conceptually, such as commercial reproductions of artworks, or whose originality is shown to be fraudulent, as in the case of fakes and forgeries, are not

40 In the West, conceptual originality on the part of artists has not always been central to the way in which artworks are understood or evaluated, but it emerges clearly in the Renaissance. It emerged, furthermore, in tandem with a whole range of other beliefs and practices which similarly gave expression to the new and revolutionary belief that humans are capable of making genuine and original discoveries about the world. In the context of art, this new understanding of human creativity led, among other things, to (1) the emergence in the sixteenth century of art history as a modern intellectual discipline (in works such as Vasari's *Lives of the artists*), the central concern of which has been to document the way great artists have discovered new and revealing ways of representing the world, and the changes their discoveries made to the development of art (e.g. Vasari 1987, vol. 1, pp. 88-9, 219, 249ff); (2) the growing recognition that artists are creative intellectuals, not just skilled craftsmen who reproduce objects according to established patterns; (3) the demand by leading artists that they be recognised as the authors of their work, and their use of devices such as signatures to distinguish their original creations from those of imitators or forgers (for a seventeenth-century example see Kitson 1996:400); (4) the emergence of the individualised, as distinct from the idealised or even deified, portrait as a new genre in art; and (5) the writing of autobiographies by artists and other creative intellectuals. These developments took place in parallel, and often in close association, with the emergence of science as a modern intellectual discipline (Butterfield 1958; Kemp 1990; Smith 1989; 1992). In medieval Europe, in contrast, artists, like scholars in the sciences and humanities, were not thought to be the source of new and authoritative knowledge about the world. The ultimate source of all genuine knowledge and intellectual creativity – in the arts, humanities and sciences – was the supernatural world, especially as revealed in the Scriptures and taught by the Church (Moran 1998). A surprising number of modern scholars, including anthropologists, mistakenly believe that the notion of originality only came to the fore, in the way art is both understood and evaluated, in the eighteenth century with the advent of the Enlightenment and the Romantic 'cult of the genius'. Some even believe that originality is no longer relevant to the way artworks are evaluated (e.g. Broude and Garrard 1982; Hein 1990), and that the lingering interest in it amounts to nothing more than a 'fetishisation of innovation and avant-gardism' (Thomas 1997:273).

only deemed to have no value aesthetically (i.e. as art) but are not even thought of as 'art'. (For a more detailed discussion of forgeries see Bowden 1999.)

In striking contrast to the way in which artworks are evaluated in the modern West, Kwoma judge quality in paintings, sculptures and other objects on the basis of two quite different criteria. For a work to be judged 'good' (*kepi*) it (1) must have been produced lawfully and (2) be correct in form. A work is 'lawful' if the artist had the right to depict the entity represented. For Kwoma, this means that regardless of how skilfully a painting or other work is executed, if its maker does not have the authority to represent the entity depicted the work will be condemned a 'bad' (*kapasek*) and not be accepted for display in a new men's house or other context. Typically, the artist will be asked to destroy the work by the owners of the entity in question.

For a work to be judged correct in form it must conform in style to that of the supernatural prototype on which it is presumed to be based. Thus, a bark painting must conform in style to that of the paintings displayed on the ceilings of ceremonial houses modelled on those created by spirits at the beginning of history, such as the one named Wayipanal.

The people who articulate a community's views about whether or not a painting or other artwork conforms in style to the supernatural prototype on which it is presumed to be based are the group's senior artists. These men publicly discuss particular cases among themselves and arrive at a consensus.

Given that one of the two primary criteria that Kwoma use to judge artworks is whether or not they conform in style to their supernatural prototypes, it is noteworthy that the term people use most commonly to praise a painting, sculpture or other artwork – '*kepi*' – means 'correct' as well as 'good' (Bowden 1997:86-87). Similarly, the term they use most commonly to express disapproval of an artwork – '*kapasek*' – means 'incorrect' (or 'wrong') as well as 'bad'.

Artistic 'anonymity'

The belief that their art replicates prototypes of supernatural origin and owes nothing of *cultural significance* to human creativity also explains why in this society no effort is made to preserve memory of the names of the great artists of the past, or of which paintings or carvings they produced. This entails that Kwoma artists are 'anonymous' culturally. In the West, knowing who produced an artwork, and when, is crucial to determining its value aesthetically (i.e. its value *as a painting*, *as a sculpture*, etc.). Without this knowledge it is not possible authoritatively to determine whether a work is original or derivative conceptually. In the modern West, the importance of knowing the historical context in which a work was produced for determining its value as art is illustrated by the fact that works which were once hailed as masterpieces, such as Van Meegeren's twentieth century pastiches of Vermeer paintings, can suddenly be devalued aesthetically and removed from display in art museums if they are discovered not to be the original works conceptually that they were first thought to be (Bowden 1999; see also Dutton 1983a, 1983b; Jones et al. 1990; Jones 1992).

For Kwoma, on the other hand, the fact that no artwork is thought to be the original creation conceptually of the person who manufactures it entails that knowing who produced particular paintings or sculptures is relevant only to determining whether they were produced lawfully, i.e. by someone who had a right to do so. But if the lawfulness of a work is assumed, as it always is when works have been accepted for display in a men's house (or a ritual), who produced it ceases to be of any interest to the wider community,

and this information is very quickly lost. I discovered this when I began documenting the paintings and sculptures on display in different men's houses. I found that if a building was relatively new and the men I was questioning had been actively involved in its construction, the names of those who had produced the different works on display were well known. But if a building had been standing for a decade or more, and especially if a number of the artists had died, even senior members of the clans that owned the building could not remember who had produced the majority of them.

In suggesting that Kwoma artists are 'anonymous' in important ways culturally I am not implying that people are unaware of the identities of their community's outstanding painters and carvers. Such men are well known. An outstandingly knowledgeable and prolific artist might even be known to the members of other Kwoma tribes, even tribes in neighbouring language groups. As elsewhere in the Sepik, furthermore, skill as an artist is one way in which men rise to positions of influence in their communities and become what Kwoma, like many other Papua New Guineans, call 'big men' (*harapa ma*, or *hisawa ma*). But once a man dies, regardless of his fame as a painter or sculptor during his lifetime, all memory of his achievements as an artist rapidly fades, as does memory of which works he produced.

One reason for raising the issue of 'anonymity' here is that a number of writers have attacked this idea as an example of the way in which Western scholars have misrepresented the role of the artist in indigenous societies. For instance, Sally Price has argued that the failure of museum curators routinely to identify by name the makers of the objects in their collections deriving from tribal societies, in contrast to the way they routinely identify Western artists by name, has served to stereotype 'primitive artists' as 'unthinking and undifferentiated tools of their respective traditions, and as people who are essentially denied the privilege of technical or conceptual creativity' (Price 1989:60). Price admits that to label this practice 'patronising' and 'racist' would 'oversimplify' matters, but in her view it 'owes much to the needs of Western observers to feel that their society represents a uniquely superior achievement in the history of humanity' (p.60). I would agree with Price that many practices in ethnographic museums leave a great deal to be desired. However, this particular criticism is misplaced for it fails to acknowledge that artists in non-Western societies are not necessarily attributed with the same culturally significant creativity ascribed to artists in the modern West, and that the identity of the makers of many objects found in Western collections might not have been known to the people from whom they were originally acquired. To assume, as Price does, that this information is readily available in all non-Western societies is to naively impose a modern Western model of art, and of the artist, on all other peoples.

There is a close parallel in the modern West of the 'anonymous' Kwoma artist. I refer to the highly skilled craftsmen who manufacture artworks designed by others. To cite one well-known case, the great modern Columbian painter and sculptor Fernando Botero, who represents humans and animals as if they have been pumped up with air and are about to burst, was not personally skilled in the art of bronze casting or carving in marble. Like many other European sculptors before him, such as Rodin, he had his bronzes, and even unique marble figures, made for him, in his case by highly skilled craftsmen at a foundry in Pietrasanta in northern Italy. Botero provided the foundry with small-scale models and its highly skilled craftsmen transformed these into the full-sized 'Botero' bronzes and marbles that are so widely admired internationally. Like Kwoma artists, these craftsmen are no doubt well known in their home communities, and might even be celebrities. However, they are 'anonymous' artistically since their names do not appear on the objects

they physically manufacture, and are probably not even known to the many collectors of Botero's sculptures or historians of modern Latin American art. Like Kwoma artists the 'anonymity' of these highly skilled craftsmen can be correlated with the fact that they are not thought of as the originators conceptually of the objects they physically bring into being, objects that originate imaginatively elsewhere – in the minds of named, creative artists.[41]

The concept of 'art'

Another very significant cultural expression of the Kwoma belief that their art is modelled on prototypes of supernatural origin and owes nothing to human creativity is the absence in their language of a term equivalent to 'art' (Bowden 1997, 1999, 2006b, 2022:103-105). Anthropologists have long been aware that the indigenous peoples of Oceania and other ethnographic regions lack close equivalents of the modern Western term 'art'. Appiah (1996:22-23), for instance, reports that there is no equivalent of 'art' in any of the 1000 languages of sub-Saharan Africa. Kaeppler similarly notes that there is no equivalent in any of the languages of Polynesia, or in reconstructed proto-Polynesian (Kaeppler 1989:212-13; see also Firth 1992:26; Anderson 1990:7; Wollheim 2003). None of these scholars, however, has been able to offer a plausible explanation for why this should be the case. I contend that the absence of a close equivalent of 'art' in Kwoma – and by implication in other indigenous languages – can be correlated with the fact that people in this society do not recognise a class or set of objects characterised by the features that define 'art' in the modern West. In the modern West, the term 'art' is used *in practice* (in contrast to the way philosophers and other theoreticians might think it is used) for entities that possess three crucial features. A work of art consists of:

1. an assemblage of images (visual, acoustic, verbal – or some combination of the three),
2. made by a human (in contrast to an unmodified natural object),
3. that reveals in ideally new and penetrating ways some aspect of the world: the physical world, the social world or both (see also Bowden 2022:83).

I include the word 'ideally' in this definition above since the range of objects that come under the heading of 'art' in the modern West forms a spectrum. This ranges, at one end, from unambiguous or paradigm cases to borderline or ambiguous cases at the other. Thus, an authentic Rembrandt or a Van Gogh would count as an unambiguous case of 'art', but a Bell helicopter, a Bang and Olufsen hi-fi set, or a Bic ballpoint pen – examples of which have been displayed in the Museum of Modern Art in New York – are ambiguous or less clear cases. Since a work of art must be originated conceptually by a human, a painting by a trained chimpanzee or elephant, despite exhibiting many 'art-like' properties, falls outside the category of 'art'.

In Kwoma society there are many objects that are characterised by the first two of the three features listed above; these include cooking pots, spears and houses. But at least in the way Kwoma understand these matters there is no set of objects characterised by all three features. This is because none of the artefacts produced in this society – including those that Westerners would call 'art' (e.g. bark paintings and sculptures) – are thought to be of human origin *conceptually*. This applies even to mundane utilitarian objects such

41 This example is also given in Bowden 1999.

as cooking pots and adzes, all of which are thought to be copies of prototypes that spirits created at the beginning of history, and are described in myths. Given that Kwoma recognise no class of objects characterised by all three of the features listed above, it should not be surprising that they lack a close equivalent of the term 'art'.

Significantly, the different terms that Kwoma do use for what in the West would be called their 'art' equate these objects with non-art entities: either mundane artefacts or even natural objects (Blocker 1994:119-204). As already noted, the term for a bark painting, *bi*, is the same as that for a blank sheet of bark, or the peel of a fruit. When people refer to a painting, therefore, they use a term that literally means 'bark' (*bi*). Similarly, the Kwoma term for sculpture, *me*, is the same as that for 'wood' or 'tree' (Bowden 1997). To refer to a sculpture, therefore, is literally to refer to a piece of 'wood' (*me*). Terms for other art forms are equally instructive in this regard. The term most commonly used for poetry, all of which is sung, is *hokwa*. As well as meaning 'song' this word is also used for 'noise' or 'sound' in general, such as a noise that someone might hear outside their house at night and wonder whether it was made by a person or some other entity (see Bowden 1997:71).

It is noteworthy that Tok Pisin (TP) – at least as it was spoken when I was doing fieldwork – also lacks a close equivalent of 'art', even though TP is still widely used as a lingua franca in modern Papua New Guinea and is the language that Kwoma, like other Sepik peoples, have mainly used when communicating with outsiders, including the many museum curators, art dealers and tourists who visit their different villages to buy their art.[42] In TP, the term for a bark painting is *panggal*. Like '*bi*', this term literally means 'bark', 'peel' or 'skin' (e.g. of a banana). The term for sculpture is *diwai*. Like '*me*', this literally means 'wood', or 'tree'.

The absence of close equivalents of 'art' in both Kwoma and TP has never prevented people from communicating effectively about paintings, sculptures and similar objects. For instance, if an art collector visiting a Kwoma village knows TP and wants to enquire if there are any bark paintings for sale, all he or she need do is ask if any 'barks' are available (e.g. '*Sampela panggal i stap?*'). People know from experience that when a visitor asks if any 'barks' are available they are not enquiring about blank sheets of bark of the kind women use as mats when sitting on the ground, or on which men paint. They know that the visitor is asking about sheets of bark that have designs painted on them. Similarly, if a visitor asks in TP if there is any 'wood' available (e.g. '*Sampela diwai i stap?*') people know from experience that they are not asking to see pieces of lumber suitable for building a house, or lumps of wood that might be used for a campfire. They know that the visitor is enquiring about pieces of wood that have designs carved on them.

Earlier in this study I noted that Kwoma do have a term that can be translated as 'design'. This is '*jebwa*'. The Tok Pisin equivalent is '*mak*', which derives from English 'mark'. But this is still not a close equivalent of 'art', for Kwoma use the term *jebwa*, like its TP equivalent, for a much wider range of entities than modern Westerners would include under that heading. These include rough designs scratched in the earth to indicate the relative positions of two entities, and the letters of the alphabet and words that people inscribe on paper when writing. The most accurate translation of *jebwa* would be 'intentionally made, meaningful mark'. This notion clearly overlaps with that of 'art', but is not equivalent to it.

---

42 The absence in Tok Pisin of any equivalent of 'art' is confirmed by Mihalic's dictionary (Mihalic 1971). Mihalic gives no term for 'art' either in the body of the dictionary or in any of the more specialised lists of 'practical' words, such as 'Schoolroom Terms' (p.334).

Figure 8.1. Yatiikapa of Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of an unnamed spirit (*aroko*) in the form of a water insect termed *arokojawiyogo*, Hamikwa totem, 139 × 76.5 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.420.

8

Learning to Paint

Young Kwoma men wishing to learn the art of painting on bark acquire this skill in the same way people in this society acquire most technical skills: by observing and imitating those who are more experienced than they. (For a discussion of learning cross-culturally in the context of art see Anderson 1989:89-114.) Kwoma divide all knowledge into two broad kinds: that which is acquired primarily visually, by looking or watching, and that which is acquired primarily aurally, by listening. Knowing how to paint on bark is an example of the former; knowing how to perform a song is an example of the latter.[43]

The most common way in which young men learn to paint is by watching artists work when they are preparing barks for a new men's house. This work is carried out publicly either in the partially finished building or at the different artists' own dwellings. Fully decorated ceremonial buildings, however, are only constructed every few years and a young man keen to learn how to paint is also entitled to ask a recognised master artist for personalised instruction. If the older man is a member of another clan the younger man is required to 'pay' (*toko*) for this service with shell valuables – the same wealth objects that are used to make all other obligatory inter-clan payments (Bowden 1988). If the instructor is a member of the same clan the younger man does not 'pay' for this service but reciprocates in kind, such as by giving assistance with gardening or roofing a new house.

In 1988 I had the opportunity to observe one of two lessons in painting which the master artist Yatiikapa of Yanggaraka clan gave his classificatory 'sister's son' Pandiiriikumb of Nggiley clan. The latter was aged about twenty-five at the time and still unmarried. His mentor was

43 Some anthropologists, as well as scholars in related disciplines such as art history, have argued that Western 'logocentric' societies privilege vision as a source of knowledge but non-Western societies often give much greater prominence to the other senses, such as smell (e.g. Howes 1990, 1991). The claim is implausible and is not supported by the evidence. The Kwoma are about as remote from Western Europe as it is possible to get both culturally and geographically, yet they, like their 'logocentric' European cousins, 'privilege' sight and sound as the principal sources of information about the world (see also Baxandall 1988:152-3). In fact, Kwoma 'privilege' vision and hearing, at least linguistically, even more strongly than in the West. As well as forming the verb 'see', the word *he* (TP '*lukim*') forms part of the terms for two of the other four conventional sensory modes: smelling (*meeji he*, literally 'hear look'; Bowden 1997:127) and tasting (*a he*, literally 'eat look'). The verb 'hear' (*meeji*; TP '*harim*') is similarly privileged linguistically, for it forms, or forms part of, the terms for three sensory modes, notably hearing (*meeji*), smelling (*meeji he*), and feeling, or, more genrally, bodily experiencing something such as an earth tremor (*meeji*). In this society, that is, the words for see and hear, together or separately, form part of the verbs for all five conventional sensory modes: seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling and tasting.

Figure 8.2. The Bangwis village master artist Yatiikapa (right) giving Pandiiriikumb of Nggiley clan a lesson in painting on bark, 1988. The completed painting is illustrated in Fig 8.1.

Figure 8.3. Pandiiriikumb standing beside five bark paintings he produced for sale, 1988 (see also Figures 8.4-8.8).

in his late sixties. The lessons took place roughly two weeks apart. Both men belonged to the same village and the lessons took place at the younger man's parent's house – at which he was still living with his unmarried siblings. Like his instructor, Pandiiriikumb's father, Wachongg, was also a master painter and prior to receiving these two lessons from his 'uncle' Yatiikapa his father had been his principal teacher. The lesson I witnessed lasted for about three hours, long enough for one painting to be completed. While it was in progress the young man's parents and other family members diplomatically absented themselves from their house.

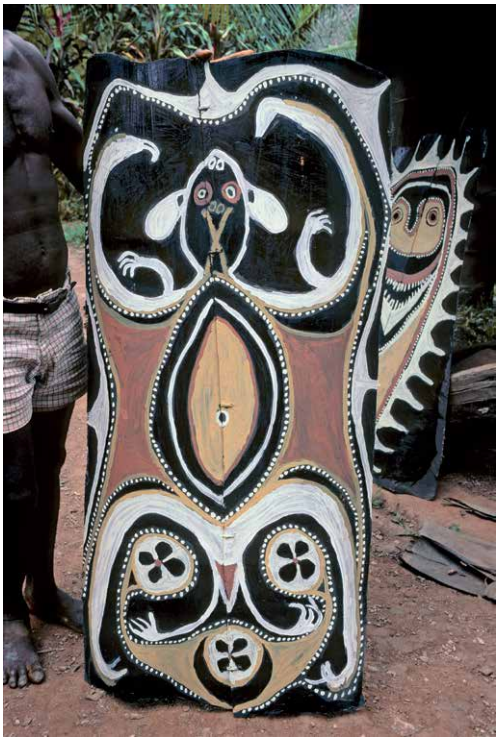

Figure 8.4. Pandiiriikumb of Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a flying fox (*apokibi*), Keyava totem, 135 × 65 cm (approx.), 1988.

The instruction took the form of the older man designing and executing a painting in his nephew's presence, telling the younger man what he was doing at each stage of the process and asking him from time to time to assist with the work. At Yatiiikapa's request the younger man had already prepared the bark and primed it with black clay. He had also assembled the required brushes, palettes and pigments. The painting produced on this occasion is illustrated in Figure 8.1.

The older man began by informing the younger of what he intended to depict: in this case a 'spirit' form of a long-legged water insect named *samalow* (also termed *arokojawiyogo*). With the bark lying flat on the ground, and his nephew squatting beside him watching carefully (Figure 8.2), Yatiikapa first outlined the main motif in clear water. While doing so he commented for his nephew's benefit, and for that of the present writer who was sitting nearby, that outlining the intended design in clear water enables the painter to make sure that it will fit on the bark. If it does not, or proves in some other way to be unsatisfactory, all the painter needs to do is wait a few minutes for the watery line to evaporate in the tropical heat and then outline the design again.

After satisfying himself that the motif he had outlined was positioned correctly on the bark Yatiikapa then asked his nephew to trace over the dark line with white paint. The younger man was clearly nervous and applied the paint hesitantly and with a shaking hand. This prompted his uncle to impress on him the importance of always producing lines of regular width and with smooth edges. Lines that vary randomly in width or have ragged edges, he emphasised, 'do not look good' and are to be avoided. After watching his nephew struggle with the white paint for a few minutes Yatiikapa took the brush out of his hand and rapidly smoothed out the less regular lines.

Figure 8.5. Pandiiriikumb of Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of waterlily flowers (*ukuba she*), Keyava totem, 135 × 65 cm (approx.), 1988. The painting depicts the showy flowers of one of the several varieties of waterlilies that grow in abundance around the edges of lagoons. The flowers are depicted in the form of two types of rosettes: circular rosettes on the two sides of the bark, and lozenge-shaped rosettes in the centre.

Figure 8.6. Pandiiriikumb of Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of an *apojin* bird, Kowariyasi tribe totem, 141 × 70 cm, 1988. The bird is depicted highly schematically five times. The black pointed ovals outlined in white arranged in a column in the centre of the design depict the bird's torso, and the adjacent yellow triangles its wings.

When the basic outline in white of the main figure had been completed Yatiikapa, again with Pandiiriikumb's assistance, filled in the details in yellow and red, along with additional quantities of white. Before applying any further pigment to the bark the older man first drew the intended line in clear water. On several occasions he reminded his nephew of the need to put as much pigment as possible on his brush so that he could paint the longest lines possible without breaks. Lines with too many breaks, he said, 'spoilt' a design.

After the main figure had been completed Yatiikapa finished the design on his own. He did this by adding a variety of other motifs, both representational and non-representational. The latter included rows of dots and solid lines in white, yellow and red, as well as scroll and hook forms around the bark's outer edges. Before adding each of these Yatiikapa consulted his nephew about whether there was sufficient room to add them, and which colours he should use.

The representational motifs were added to a substantial area of unpainted black ground in the lower right-hand corner of the bark. Yatiikapa informed his nephew that this area was 'too large' to be left with no motif painted on it. After briefly discussing with him what he should depict he announced that he would add representations of a crocodile (*mo*) and a fish (*emiyep*). The type of fish was not specified. As with the other motifs he

Figure 8.7. Pandiiriikumb of Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a design commonly found on gourd lime containers in Iatmul-speaking villages on the Sepik River, not totemic, 135 × 65 cm (approx.), 1988

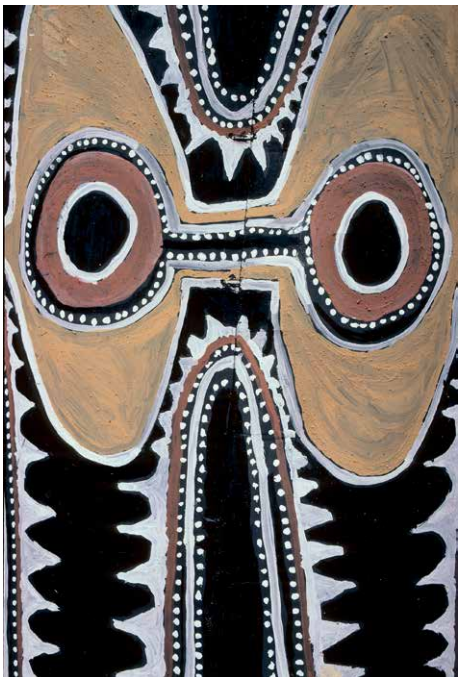

Figure 8.8. Detail of bark painting shown in Figure 8.7.

first outlined each figure in clear water. After tracing over the outline of the fish with yellow paint Yatiikapa suddenly turned to this writer and asked for advice about what colour he should use next. As he had already used yellow it was suggested that he use white. Smiling, the master painter agreed that white was a good choice, and proceeded to complete the figure using both white and red. When both of these minor representational motifs had been completed Yatiikapa informed his nephew that the lesson had come to an end and that he would leave it him to apply the varnish to the larger unpainted areas of black undercoat, something the younger man did the following day. Yatiikapa then returned to his house.

During the two-week period between the two lessons Yatiikapa gave him, the nephew completed five other barks on his own initiative (Figures 8.3-8.8). No men's houses were under construction at the time and he produced these in the hope of selling them. Technically, the paintings were competent but crude stylistically compared to the one I observed Yatiikapa execute in his presence. The main motifs sit somewhat awkwardly on the barks and several featured large visually uninteresting areas of black ground and other colours. Although nothing like as polished as those by more experienced painters, such barks would probably have been accepted for display in a new men's house, provided they were judged 'correct' in form. But like those by other inexperienced painters they would have been placed high up on the ceiling in the less visible areas and probably partially obscured by others overlapping them.

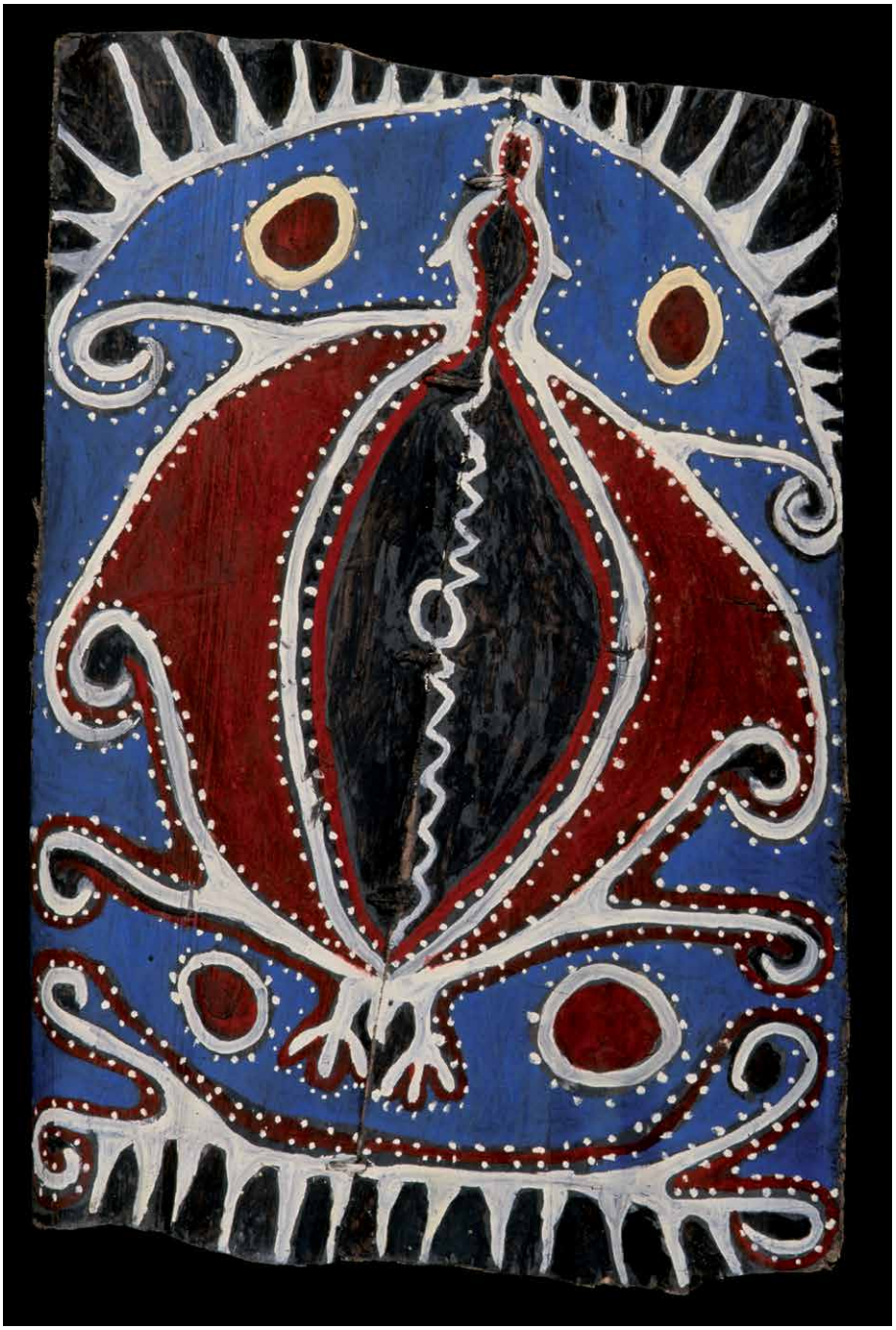

Figure 9.1. Mburunggay, Amachey clan, Melawei village. Bark painting of a flying fox (*apokibi*), Keyava totem, 97.7 × 67.6 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.429.

9

Recent Developments

To the best of my knowledge no Kwoma bark paintings survive from the pre-contact period (i.e. from prior to around 1912). The oldest collections, at least those of any size, date from after the Second World War. On the evidence of these collections the Kwoma painting style had changed little up to the time when the research for this book was undertaken. This can be correlated with the fact that no commercial market of any consequence has ever developed for this form of Sepik art and that Kwoma, unlike many Australian Aboriginal peoples, have never come under commercial pressure to modify their style to make it more viable in the art market (see Chapter 1). Changes nevertheless are slowly taking place, some of which are more obvious than others. This chapter documents those of which I am aware.

New colours and painting materials

The most obvious way in which the painting style is changing is in the use of non-indigenous pigments. Since the 1960s Kwoma artists have been incorporating synthetic pigments into designs on bark and on sculptures. The preferred commercial paints are oil-based enamels. Many of the paintings in Wayipanal, for instance, incorporated non-indigenous yellows, reds, blues and greens. Commercial pigments are valued for their greater brightness (reflectivity), durability and for the greater range of hues they offer. Like indigenous pigments, acrylic and enamel paints are applied over the traditional ground of black clay – a medium to which they adhere remarkably successfully. Figure 9.1 illustrates a bark that incorporates brilliant blue and red commercial enamels along with the indigenous white and black. This depicts a flying fox. It is one of a number which the painter, Mburunggay of Melawei village, produced on commission from me in 1988. Like other leading painters, the artist enjoyed experimenting with new media and proudly described this bark, in Tok Pisin, as a 'mixed media' work (TP *mikis*). Three other paintings by this artist which make use of the same blue and red enamels are illustrated in Chapter 10 (Figures 10.42 – 10.44).

Kwoma make no distinction in value between designs produced exclusively with indigenous pigments and those incorporating paints of non-indigenous origin. Provided they have been produced lawfully, and are acceptable stylistically, barks that make use of non-indigenous pigments are readily incorporated into the ceiling decorations in men's houses.

Periodically artists have also experimented with other painting materials, though not always successfully. For instance, Wachongg, one of the most prominent Bangwis village

Figure 9.2. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of fruit of the *mima bodi* tree, Tek totem, 110 × 70 cm (approx.). Made *c*1967. Photographed in situ in Wayipanal men's house, rear left corner, 1978.

painters of his day, tried using kerosene rather than water to mix the yellow and white pigments used in the painting illustrated in Figure 9.2. The black ground is traditional and the red an oil-based enamel. He produced this bark in the late 1960s for display in Wayipanal men's house, which was then under construction. But shortly after the bark had been fixed to the ceiling, where it remained until the building was demolished in 1994, the white and yellow paint began to flake off, leaving only the fragments seen in the photograph – taken ten years later. Paint flaking off a bark soon after it has been placed on display in a men's house is regarded as inauspicious and a harbinger of a misfortune that will befall the artist's family – or some other close relative. According to the artist himself, this painting proved to be no exception. Soon after Wayipanal was completed one of his clan 'fathers', named Payip, suddenly died. This man was a celebrated painter and sculptor and had been Wachongg's principal teacher in the art of painting on bark.

New motifs

A second, but less obvious, change in the art has been a widening of the range of entities depicted in paintings. These include Kwoma sculptures, which artists say were formerly never represented in two-dimensional form, as well as non-indigenous objects. The latter consist both of objects introduced to New Guinea since European contact and entities deriving from other Sepik societies. Men have often seen these objects when travelling outside the boundaries of their own language group, something they could not do safely before intertribal warfare in this region came to an end after the Second World War.

One example of a painting inspired by a sculpture is Wachongg's representation of two figures associated with the Yena ceremony (Figure 9.3). These figures, termed Yena 'heads' (*Yena masek*), take the form of stylised anthropomorphic heads attached to long stakes. The stakes, which form part of the carvings, are the means by which such figures were lashed to the platform on which they were displayed inside a men's house during a performance of this ceremony (Figures 9.4 and 9.5; see also Bowden 1983a, 2022: Figure 16). In the painting, the sculptures have been represented as stylised heads with clearly delineated eyes, noses and mouths. According to the artist, the larger of the two heads depicted a sculpture named Shokwin, which he himself owned, and the smaller a figure named Yanindiimi, owned by Awonow clan, another group at Bangwis. Wachongg said that he depicted these two sculptures in the same painting because they were customarily displayed together in performances of the Yena ceremony which the two clans that own these figures jointly sponsored. The spirits the two ritual figures represent, he added, are 'friends' (*nareboy*), like the members of the two clans that own them.

When the Kwoma were still performing their secret men's rituals copies of the figures displayed in them were commonly added to the decorative artwork in a men's house. But as noted previously the forms of the figures were always altered slightly so as not give away any ritual secrets. Despite the frequency with which near-replicas of secret ritual carvings were displayed in men's houses Wachongg's bark was the only example I documented of a painting made for public display that depicted such figures.

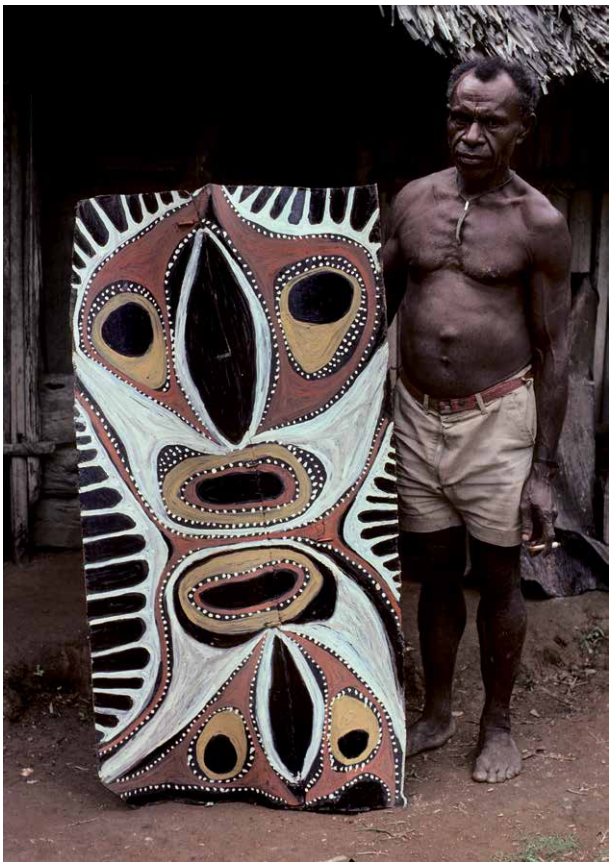

Figure 9.3. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis village, with his depiction of two Yena ceremonial sculptures, 110 × 70 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.

Figure 9.4. Yena ceremonial sculpture named Sasap owned by Hipo clan, Bangwis. Carved in the 1920s; height 123.4 x width 26.2 x depth 13.5 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, cat. 2001.433. Photo 1996.

Figure 9.5. Yena ceremonial sculpture named Wanggiiriimu Kiipiika carved by Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis, 1973; height 192.2 x width 31.6 x depth 24.9 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, cat. 2001.435. Photo 1996.

When Wachongg first showed me this painting he did not reveal that it depicted two secret Yena figures. He told me initially that it was a painted (i.e. two-dimensional) version of a type of sculpture depicting symmetrically opposed heads, named *arokomaka*, which is carved in large numbers on beams in men's houses (Figures 9.6 and 9.7). Like ceremonial sculptures, *arokomaka* figures formerly were rarely if ever depicted in paintings on bark. But in recent decades they have become a popular subject of such designs. As in the carved form of these figures, the two heads in Wachongg's painting reflect each other across a horizontal mirror line and touch at their chins.

However, shortly after telling me that the painting depicted a pair of *arokomaka* heads Wachongg confided that what he had first told me was incorrect and that the painting actually depicted two secret Yena sculptures. The reason why he had been reluctant to reveal this, he said, was that he had not asked members of Awonow clan, who owned one of the two figures, for permission to represent their sculpture in his painting, and that he was afraid that if this became common knowledge they would demand that he destroy the bark. Wachongg produced this painting in 1982 not for display in a new ceremonial house but on commission from me when I was making a collection for the Papua New Guinea National Museum. He therefore knew that the painting would be permanently removed from his village soon after it had been completed. Like many other men who gave me information in confidence about different artworks they had made, Wachongg said that he had no objection to me publishing a photograph of the work, or giving an account of its

Figure 9.6. *Arokomaka* double-face design carved on an eaves beam, Nggeyasatuk men's house, Bangwis village. Sculpture made *c1*978. Photo 1982.

Figure 9.7. *Arokomaka* double-face design carved on an eaves beam, Wayipanal men's house, Bangwis village. Sculpture made *c*1967. Photo 1988.

subject matter. The only thing that I was not to do was reveal what he had told me while the painting was still in the village. If anyone did ask about it, I was to tell them what he had initially told me: that it depicted a pair of *arokomaka* heads.

Representations of non-indigenous entities

A third way in which Kwoma painting is changing is through the depiction of non-indigenous entities. One example is Meyimbor's painting of a steer (Figure 9.8). Steers were introduced to the Sepik region, for the local beef trade, shortly after first contact at the end of the nineteenth century. The animal depicted in this painting is one a group of Kwoma

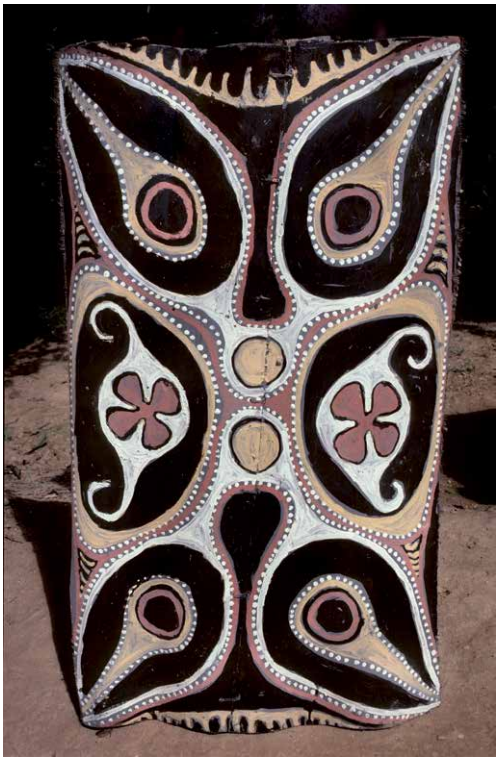

Figure 9.8. Meyimbor, Hipo clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of a steer, not totemic, 116 × 65 cm, 1988.

entrepreneurs brought to the Washkuk Hills in the 1980s and at that time could be seen grazing on the long grass growing beside the track that runs between Ambunti and Bangwis.

The representation of the steer in this bark is so highly stylised that without the artist's own testimony it would be impossible to say what it depicted. According to Meyimbor, the painting depicts the animal by means of its head or 'face' (*misoma*). This is shown twice, once in the upper half of the design and once, in mirror reflection, in the lower half. Only two features of the animal's head have been shown: its large dark eyes and its huge bulbous nose. The eyes are the large black roundels outlined in red. The nose takes the form of the perpendicular black shapes with bulbous ends. The other motifs, the artist said, are all non-representational and were added only to fill out the design.

When Meyimbor told me that this bark depicted a steer I assumed that the pear-shaped forms in the four corners represented the animal's horns. When I put this to him, however, he flatly rejected the suggestion, and even found it a little puzzling. He said that when he was first planning the picture he had intended to represent the animal's horns, which he agreed were one of its most distinctive features. To do so in a three-dimensional carving, he said, would have been 'easy'. But there was no established way, he claimed, of doing so in a bark painting and therefore decided to omit them.[44]

---

44 Meyimbor's contention that he was unable to devise a satisfactory way of representing the steer's projecting horns in a two-dimensional design on bark, because there was no established way of doing so, illustrates Gombrich's contention that the representation of natural objects in art is a 'skill encoded in tradition', and that if the tradition, or at least the beginnings of it, does not exist an artist has no way of doing so (Gombrich 1996c:358; see also Gombrich 1968).

Experiments with figurative designs

A fourth way in which the painting style is slowly changing is through the increasing frequency with which figurative imagery is occurring. All of the oldest painters that I knew said that figurative imagery was rare in bark paintings before about 1960. Today it is found increasingly frequently both in designs on bark and in paintings (as distinct from carvings) on posts and beams in men's houses. The increasing use of figurative imagery in paintings in part reflects the growing popularity of figurative sculpture as the subject of designs. But it also reflects the exposure that people in the Washkuk Hills have had since first contact to the more figurative art of neighbouring peoples on the Sepik, such as the Iatmul, as well as Western imagery, especially as seen in school texts, commercial advertising and illustrated editions of the Bible.

One painting, according to the artist's own testimony, in which the figurative imagery derives from a sculpture is Wachongg's representation of a type of a monitor lizard (*gey*; Figure 9.9; see also Figures 3.10 – 3.15). There are several varieties of *gey* lizard. The one depicted, termed *nawuriiman*, is a totem of the artist's clan. These lizards grow up to a metre or more in length, are capable of running short distances on their hind legs at great speed, and are expert at climbing trees. In this painting the animal is shown climbing a tree. It has been represented dorsally, after the manner of a flying fox, with its head, legs and powerful tail outstretched. The artist has also given the animal a pair of testicles. These were added, Wachongg said, to indicate that this particular type of lizard is 'male' (*ma*) grammatically. Like the same artist's representation of two Yena spirits discussed above, Wachongg produced this painting as part of a set I commissioned for the Papua New Guinea National Museum in 1982, not for display in a new ceremonial house.

Figurative representations of animals such as the one depicted in this painting (Figure 9.9) are still relatively rare in Kwoma graphic art but they are common elsewhere in the Sepik and in the art of Oceania as a whole (e.g. Greub 1992). It is possible that the artist had seen such painted representations of lizards when visiting other Sepik language groups, or even in books or magazines showing art from other parts of the Pacific. By his own account, however, the direct inspiration for the painting came from a portable carving which he had made for sale several years earlier but still had in his possession (see Figures 9.10 – 9.11). This sculpture took the form of an ovoid panel about 100 cm long, 30 cm wide and 20 cm deep. It had a stylised face carved in low relief on its concave front and a representation in low relief of a *nawuriiman* lizard on its convex back. The posture of the carved lizard was identical to that in the painting.

Another example of a figurative painting which is quite atypical of Kwoma designs on bark is Meyimbor's representation of the mythical woman named Tumbishikay (Figure 9.12). Like Wachongg's painting described above this bark was not produced for display in a new men's house but was made on commission from me.

The painting is atypical stylistically in several ways. First, it is the only bark among the 135 on which this study is based that depicts a human anthropomorphically. Second, it is one of only two which depicts a named personage in a myth. Third, it is the only Kwoma bark painting I saw that depicted a human figure both figuratively and in a sexually explicit pose. The woman is shown frontally with her legs spread wide apart and her mature genitalia exposed.[45]

45 Such paintings, however, are found on posts and beams in men's houses.

Figure 9.9. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis, with his bark painting of a monitor lizard of the *nawuriiman* variety shown climbing a tree, 125 × 85 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery. The artist identified the small black roundels enclosed within the mask-like forms on each side of the lizard's tail at the bottom of the design as 'eyes' (*miyi*), but said that this was 'only a name' and that the motifs did not represent actual eyes. The large red crosses on each side of the animal's belly are stylised representations of waterlily leaves (*ukuba biika*). The adjacent yellow W-shaped motifs, rotated 90 degrees from the vertical, depict both the flower's stalk and the plant's long underwater stem. The other motifs are non-representational.

The woman in question is the eponymous heroine of a myth named The Song of Tumbishikay ('*Tubishikay Yapo*'). Among other things this deals with the origin of domestic chickens and many other types of birds. The story tells of a spirit python named Riikumb whose lair is located in the underworld beneath a deep forest pool. One day the python emerges from his lair to go hunting in the surrounding forest. Before leaving to hunt he leaves the ceremonial penis-sheath he wears, for safe keeping, floating in the pool.

Later that day an unmarried girl named Tumbishikay finds the penis-sheath while foraging in the forest. Mistaking it for a fish she collects it and takes it home to eat. But when she sets it on her kitchen fire the 'fish' refuses to cook and several times leaps off the flames on to the ground. Eventually the girl becomes tired of waiting for the fish to cook and eats it raw. When she does so she immediately begins to menstruate. When the python returns to his lair and discovers that his penis-sheath is missing, other spirits who live nearby and saw what had happened inform him that it was taken by a young woman. Following her scent, he tracks the girl to her house. There the python menacingly informs the young girl's parents that because Tumbishikay has 'eaten his penis-sheath' (a euphemism for initiating sexual activity) she is now his wife and must accompany him back to his forest home. The girl reluctantly agrees and is escorted into the forest by her parents. However, when the python is guiding the girl down through the water to his underworld lair he suddenly wraps his powerful body around her and crushes her to death. He then lets her lifeless corpse float to the surface. Tumbishikay's parents, who are still waiting beside the pool to see if anything untoward happens to their daughter, lift her broken body out of the water and take it home and bury it.

Figure 9.10. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis, showing the front of a carving he made *c*1960 decorated with a stylised face in low relief, 1982.

Figure 9.11. Rear of the sculpture illustrated in Figure 9.10 decorated with a low-relief carving of a *nawuriiman* lizard climbing a tree, 1982.

Over the following several days her bones transform into different types of birds. These emerge, one by one, from her grave. Each time a bird emerges from the grave the girl's parents catch it and try to domesticate it. But the only one that accepts domestication and does not escape into the forest when it is released is the domestic chicken, a bird that has since become a fixture in Kwoma villages. Unlike domestic fowls today, the bird that emerged from Tumbishikay's grave had an enormously long tail which it dragged along the ground behind it. Modern chickens are valued for the way they clear insects from around domestic dwellings, for food on festive occasions, and for the rooster's crowing at first light which, people say, serves as an 'alarm clock', indicating that it is time to begin the day's work. Their eggs are a minor source of food.

Meyimbor gave no explanation for the highly atypical figurative imagery in this painting. There can be little doubt, however, that it derives from representations of women in the art of neighbouring Iatmul-speaking peoples on the Sepik (Bateson 1958), or from other modern paintings based on the same figurative imagery. Like other Kwoma men, Meyimbor has frequently passed through Iatmul-speaking villages while travelling to Wewak on the north coast, which Kwoma periodically visit to purchase goods that cannot be obtained at Ambunti. In these villages he would have had many opportunities to familiarise himself with the Iatmul style of painting.

In Iatmul art, one context in which sexually explicit two-dimensional representations of females similar in form to the figure in Meyimbor's painting are found is on skull racks (Figures 9.13 and 9.14). These artefacts take the form of large painted panels with a row of

Figure 9.12. Meyimbor, Hipo clan, Bangwis. Bark painting of the mythical woman named Tumbishikay owned by the Hamikwa totemic division, 106.7 × 67.7 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.403.

spikes protruding from the top. They are displayed inside men's houses. When intertribal warfare was still being practised by river villages, Iatmul displayed overmodelled and decorated heads of enemies killed in the fighting on the spikes protruding from the tops of these painted panels. A skull rack deriving from Torembi village, now in the Frankfurt Museum of World Cultures, is illustrated in Figure 9.13. The sexually explicit representation of the woman in the centre of the design is shown more clearly in Figure 9.14. The painting shows a sexually mature woman with her legs spread wide apart revealing her genitalia. Her arms are outstretched in a pose very similar to that of the figure in Meyimbor's painting.[46]

The immediate source of the imagery in Meyimbor's painting, however, was probably not an indigenous artefact but another modern painting that draws on the same sexually explicit imagery (Figure 9.15). This was a mural executed in house paints that formerly decorated the western wall of the Ambunti Post Office. The painting was commissioned in the 1960s by Warren Hanson, the then proprietor of the Post Office. In 2001 Hanson, who by then had moved to Wewak, informed me that he never knew the names of the men who did the painting but understood that they were 'Washkuks', that is, men deriving from the Washkuk Hills. Regardless of whether the artists were Kwoma or Iatmul men living at Ambunti the painting incorporates figurative and sexually explicit features not previously found in Kwoma bark paintings but are common in the art of neighbouring peoples on the Sepik.

46 For other examples of skull racks see Bühler 1960:23; Kelm 1966-68, vol. 1: Plates 384 and 394; Münzel 1987, vol. 1: p. 41; see also Fraser 1966:36-99; Schindlbeck 2015:97).

Figure 9.13. Iatmul skull rack with sexually explicit representation of a woman in the centre (see also Figure 9.14). Collected in 1961 by Eike Haberland at Torembi village, length *c*264 cm. Museum of World Cultures, Frankfurt am Main, cat. NS 46478. The woman might appear to have testicles and a penis, but these are exaggerated representations of her labia and clitoris.

Figure 9.14. Detail of skull rack shown in Figure 9.13.

Figure 9.15. Part of a mural painted in the 1960s on the western wall of the Ambunti Post Office. Photo 1972.

One part of the mural (Figure 9.15) shows two larger-than-life sexually mature human figures, one female, one male. Both are flanked by a variety of other entities which are similarly depicted figuratively. Both the man and the woman are shown frontally, the woman with her legs drawn up and spread wide apart, with their genitalia exposed. Each figure holds the tail of a giant serpent in one hand, the woman with her right hand and the man with his left. The head of each snake touches its holder's genitals. The similarities between the female figure in this mural and the woman in Meyimbor's design are too numerous to be coincidental. In the mural and in Meyimbor's painting the female figure is represented with:

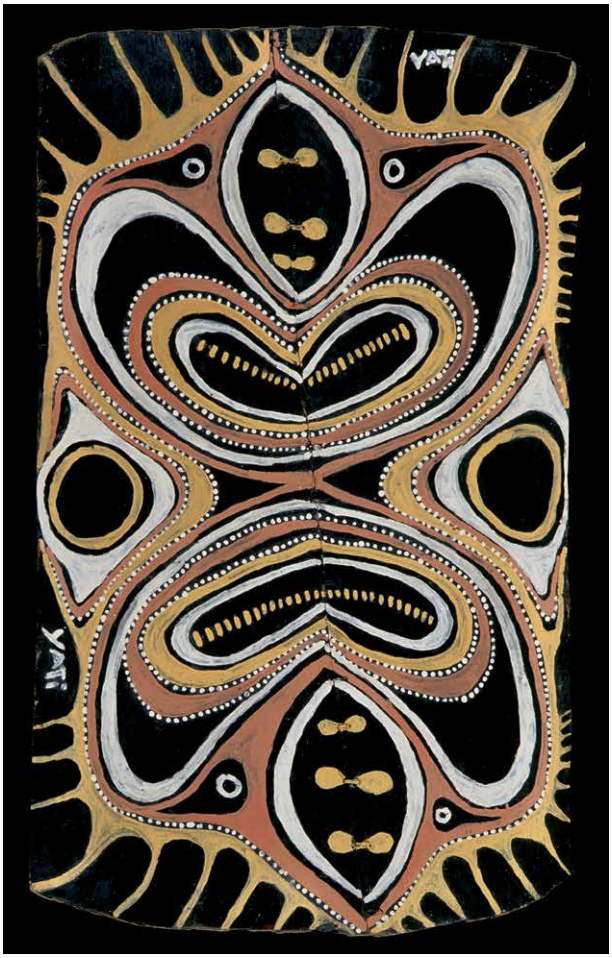

Figure 9.16. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Bark painting based on a carved *me niik* double-face design, not totemic, 114.9 × 69.9 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.427. This is a painted (two-dimensional) version of one of several types of symmetrically opposed heads which are carved in large numbers in low relief on beams in men's houses. The heads (or 'faces', *misoma*) are generically termed '*arokomaka*'. Two examples of carved *arokomaka* figures are illustrated in Figures 9.6 and 9.7. According to the artist, the type of head depicted in this painting is named *me niik*. Such symmetrically opposed heads depict unnamed 'spirits' (*sikiyawas*, or *aroko*), in contrast to the individually named spirits represented by secret ritual figures. In this painting each head displays two small but penetrating eyes, a large ovoid black nose and a large heart-shaped mouth outlined by concentric solid and dotted lines. Each mouth displays a single row of teeth – in the form of a row of yellow dashes. The other motifs are non-representational.

- arms outstretched,
- a decorative keloid on her stomach – a sign in this region of mature womanhood (see also Figures 2.12 and 9.14),
- face painted red,
- long earrings hanging from her ears, and
- a giant snake next to her, the head of which touches her genitals.

There is no longer a postal service at Ambunti and the mural itself has long since been erased. But the building in which the Post Office was located is in the centre of town and the mural was on public display for at least a decade from the late 1960s – and attracted a great deal of interest from passers-by. At that time Meyimbor was a mature man and, like other Kwoma, would have seen the mural many times when he visited Ambunti, and would no doubt have periodically stopped to admire it.

Signatures

The final change in Kwoma painting that deserves comment here is the fact that some of the leading artists now occasionally sign their works. In the case of older painters their

name is often the only word they can write (Figure 9.16). The practice of signing paintings began in the late 1960s and by the late 1980s leading painters such as Yatiikapa and Manal Kapay were signing one in every four or five of their works, sometimes more than once (e.g. Figure 9.16). Most of the men who had started signing their paintings had visited major urban centres such as Port Moresby, and some had even travelled overseas where they had visited art galleries and had the opportunity to meet practising artists. Yatiikapa had even spent a year in the second half of the 1970s, along with other distinguished village-based artists from around the country, at the National Art School in Port Moresby at the invitation of the Papua New Guinea government. There he got to know major urban indigenous artists such as Akis and Kauage. In the 1980s he spent several months in the United States of America at the invitation of an anthropologist who had done fieldwork in this region. (See the biographical note on this artist in Chapter 10.)

In the West, the practice of signing artworks is one way in which artists identify themselves as the authors of their original creations and register their intellectual rights in them. In Europe, the practice first became common in the Renaissance and was one expression of the modern understanding that humans are capable of making genuine and original discoveries about the world and of embodying their discoveries in artworks (see Bowden 2022:61-102). Earlier in this book (Chapter 7) I argued that Kwoma, unlike modern Europeans, traditionally did not attribute culturally significant creativity to artists. This entailed that they gave no importance to knowing who produced particular artworks other than for the purpose of determining whether they were produced lawfully. If a painting or sculpture was deemed to have been produced lawfully the identity of the person who produced it was of no relevance culturally, and this information was in fact very quickly lost.

The fact that leading painters such as Yatiikapa and Manal Kapay by the 1970s were beginning to sign many of their works was not, in my view, a sign that they had adopted a modern Western understanding of art. At most, it indicated they were aware that urban artists did the same, that such persons enjoyed high status in the social circles in which they moved, and that the work of the leading artists sold for substantially higher prices than that of others. In time, however, Kwoma might well adopt a modern Western understanding of art as a cultural phenomenon. This is most likely to happen if a thriving commercial market for their work develops, and if outsiders, and Kwoma themselves, begin to distinguish in quality between the achievements of different artists on the basis of the criteria used in the modern West, notably their relative originality conceptually (see Chapter 7). If they do, they will simultaneously take on a whole series of new beliefs. These will include the belief that humans, not spirits, are the source of all knowledge about the world; that humans, not supernatural beings, created their society and its art; that the works of the leading artists are unique historically and worth preserving; and that individual artists can, through their original creations, change their society's style of painting and sculpture.

10

Six Painters & Their Paintings on Bark

This chapter documents in detail a selection of bark paintings by six Kwoma artists. Five of the painters were from Bangwis village and one from Melawei. Each selection of barks is preceded by a biographical note on the artist. Other barks by the same men are illustrated earlier in this book. Works on paper by several of these painters are documented in Chapter 11.

Figure 10.1. Yatiikapa of Bangwis village sitting under his house working on one of the paintings illustrated in Figure 10.10, 1988.

Yatiikapa

Biographical note

Yatiikapa of Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis village, was born around 1920 and was a teenager when the American anthropologists John Whiting and Stephen Reed carried out fieldwork among the Kwoma in 1936-37. Although not identified in the photograph he is the boy in the middle of the group of three shown in Plate 5A in Whiting and Reed's article 'Report on fieldwork in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea' (Whiting and Reed 1938-39). First European contact with the Kwoma took place a little over twenty years before Whiting and Reed's visit but the outside world had little impact on the Kwoma until after the Second World War. The artist, therefore, grew to adulthood in what was effectively a fully traditional society. He died in November 2003.

Yatiikapa, or 'Yati' as he usually called himself, was one of his tribe's most admired painters and sculptors. He was also widely travelled. In the second half of the 1970s, at the invitation of the newly independent national government of Papua New Guinea, he spent a year with other distinguished village artists from around the country at the National Art School in Port Moresby studying art-making techniques. There he had the opportunity to get to know major urban indigenous painters and sculptors such as Kauage and Akis. Later he spent several months in California at the invitation of an anthropologist where he produced a number of barks and sculptures for the Stanford University collection. The artist's name means 'Bad Leg' (*yatii*, leg, foot; *kapa*, an abbrevion of *kapasek*, bad), a reference to the fact that he badly damaged his toes on both feet as a young boy when he rolled into his family's kitchen hearth in his sleep. Yati himself attributed the accident to being 'thrown' into the fire by a malicious spirit. Although he walked with a limp, his physical impairment did not prevent him from taking an active part in all community activities, including energetic, all-night sessions of singing and dancing in different men's houses during ceremonies. Like other prominent artists, Yati was keen to pass on his knowledge to younger men and gave lessons in painting whenever requested (see Chapter 8). His own sons never learned to paint or carve or had any interest in doing so. One became a school teacher and left his village permanently to live elsewhere in Papua New Guinea; the other did a degree in civil engineering at The University of Technology in Lae and today runs a small engineering business at Ambunti (Bowden 2023b [Part 2]: 5).

Figure 10.2. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Flying fox (*apokibi*), Keyava totem, 107.5 × 68.6 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2002.389.

Figure 10.2

This painting depicts the largest of the several varieties of flying fox (*apokibi*) found in the Washkuk Hills. The animal is shown twice, once in the upper half of the design and once, in mirror reflection, in the lower half. Both images display the animal dorsally (from the back) and as if flying with its distinctively curved wings, dog-like head and legs outstretched. The torso is depicted partly in X-ray fashion, the serpentine yellow line representing its intestinal tract (*sugu*). The small yellow circle in the middle of this line is the animal's 'navel' (*kubu*). According to the artist the other motifs are non-representational and were added to 'fill out' the design.

The different varieties of flying fox are all totemic and are owned by one group or another. The variety depicted here is not owned by the artist's clan but by a group of clans at Melawei village. Yati depicted the animal in this painting, he emphasised, with the agreement of its owners. The different varieties of flying fox figure prominently in a myth known, in greater or lesser detail, by all Kwoma. The narrative describes how the women living at a particular village transformed into flying foxes and flew off into the forest, never to return. They did so after being repeatedly mistreated by their husbands. Their husbands, the myth indicates, treated their wives as little more than sources of sexual pleasure and domestic services. According to the myth, each morning the men would depart as a group for the forest to hunt and before they returned would cook and eat the choicest parts of the catch themselves. The only cuts they gave their wives were the unpalatable leftovers. After briefly visiting their wives at their individual dwellings, where they would have sex with them, the men would retire as a group to their ceremonial house where they spent the evening enjoying each other's company, and slept the night. At dawn the next morning they would return to the forest for another day's hunting. Fed up with their husbands' inconsiderate behaviour the women collectively decided to leave. They made flying fox skins out of leaves and other bush materials, donned these and after performing powerful magic acquired the ability to fly. After testing their wings with short flights around the village they flew away as a group to a new home in a distant part of the forest.

Most Kwoma myths contain overt moral messages. Whenever men hear this story, or view one of the many bark paintings on display in men's houses depicting flying foxes, they are powerfully reminded that if they seriously neglect or mistreat their wives they could leave them as suddenly and irrevocably as the women do their husbands in the myth. In this society a woman can leave her husband at any time and there is nothing he can do to stop her. However, a woman will never leave her husband if she has young children in her care. But if she has no children, or her children are old enough to look after themselves, a seriously disgruntled woman might suddenly leave her husband without warning. But she will do so only after she has secretly arranged, well in advance, to marry another man, usually a member of another tribe. All she will take with her is her personal net bag and the few items it contains – the only personal property a woman owns. If an abandoned husband attempted to recover his wife by force this would provoke an armed confrontation with the new husband's group. Following a divorce, any children that resulted from the marriage remain with their father, whose rights in them were established when he made the bridewealth payment for their mother.

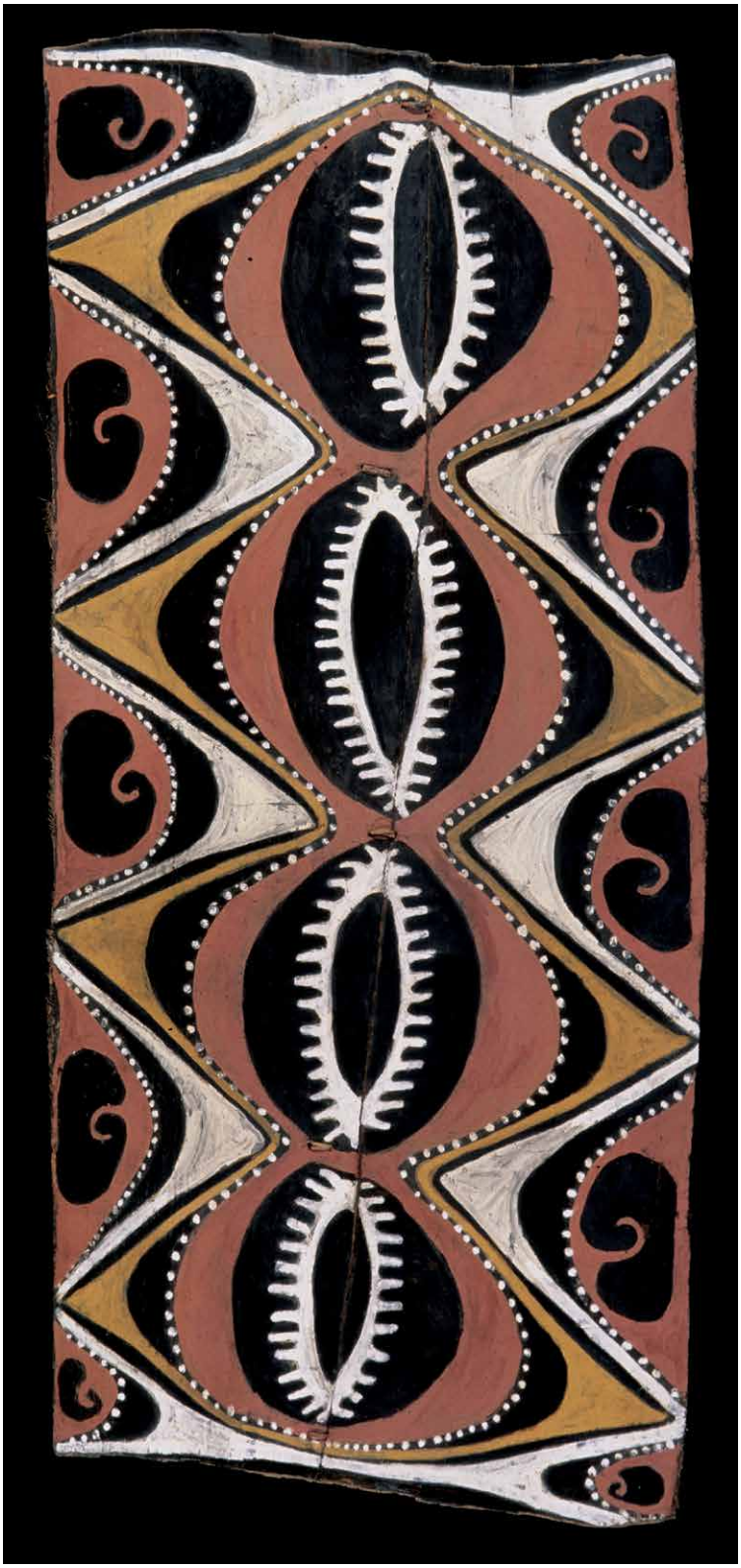

Figure 10.3. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Flying fox (*apokibi*), Keyava totem, 137 × 64 cm, 1973. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.393.

Figure 10.3

The painting in Figure 10.3 is another representation of a flying fox (*apokibi*) of the same variety as that depicted in the previous bark. In the latter the animal is depicted figuratively. In this painting it is represented 'abstractly' and schematically. The different parts of the animal have also been disarticulated anatomically. Taken together, these two barks illustrate the very different ways in which a single entity can be depicted in different visual contexts.

According to the artist, the four black pointed ovals outlined in white forming a column in the centre of the design are different representations of the flying fox's trunk or torso. The yellow triangular forms outlined in white on either side of these pointed ovals represent its outspread wings. The small red hook forms inside each of the black roundels on the outer edges of the design depict the animal's powerful claws (the tips of greatly elongated fingers) which protrude from the leading edge of its membranous wings.

Figure 10.4. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Green parrot (*apojin*), Kowariyasi tribe totem, 143.2 × 70.8 cm, 1973. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.390.

Figure 10.4

The green parrot (*apojin*) that forms the subject of this painting is one of the many varieties of fruit-eating birds that abound in the tropical forest that blankets the Washkuk Hills. Like most parrots, this variety roosts in hollows in old trees. Based on colour plates in books, men likened it to the Blue-Collared Parrot and Brehm's Parrot (Rutgers 1970:105-6, 110-11).

The bird is represented six times highly schematically. Only its outstretched wings and torso are depicted. The wings are the curved forms in white arranged in a column in the centre of the design, the outer ends of which are close to the edge of the bark. The black oval forms enclosed within the wings and outlined in yellow depict its torso. The other motifs are non-representational. The artist's clan owns several varieties of parrots, but the one depicted here is owned by another totemic group.

This and many other species of parrots found in the Washkuk Hills figure prominently in a myth known to all Kwoma which forms part of the song cycle named Sawohokwa ('Narrative Song'). The story describes conflict that occurred at the beginning of history between humans and fruit-eating birds. It tells of a huge flock of parrots of different varieties that were in the habit of descending on people's gardens and stripping the banana trees of their fruit before the gardeners could harvest them. Realising that their hard labour cultivating bananas was coming to nothing the men decided to kill the birds. One night they climbed the giant forest tree in which the birds were roosting, intending to drag them out of their holes and kill them. To gain access to its highest branches they used a long rattan ladder. But White Cockatoo, who lived nearby, took pity on the parrots and while the men were ascending the ladder cut through the rattan with its powerful beak and sent the men plummeting to their deaths. The birds then abandoned the tree and took up residence far away. When visitors from a neighbouring village learned of this catastrophe they vowed to track down the birds and take revenge. Eventually they located the tree to which the birds had moved, high up on a mountain, and after carefully planning their assault managed to trap the birds in net bags placed over the entrances to the different holes in which they were roosting. They clubbed the birds to death and used their brightly coloured plumes to make personal ornaments. However, a few of the birds managed to escape and these, the myth reports, became the ancestors of the different varieties of parrots that still live in the forest today. To the people's great annoyance, these birds continue to compete energetically with them for the bananas they grow in their small and scattered forest gardens. One of the lessons that Kwoma draw from this myth is that humans have very limited technical control over the natural environment in which they live, and that the Washkuk Hills are full of resourceful animals which cannot be prevented from taking a significant share of the food they cultivate in their gardens.

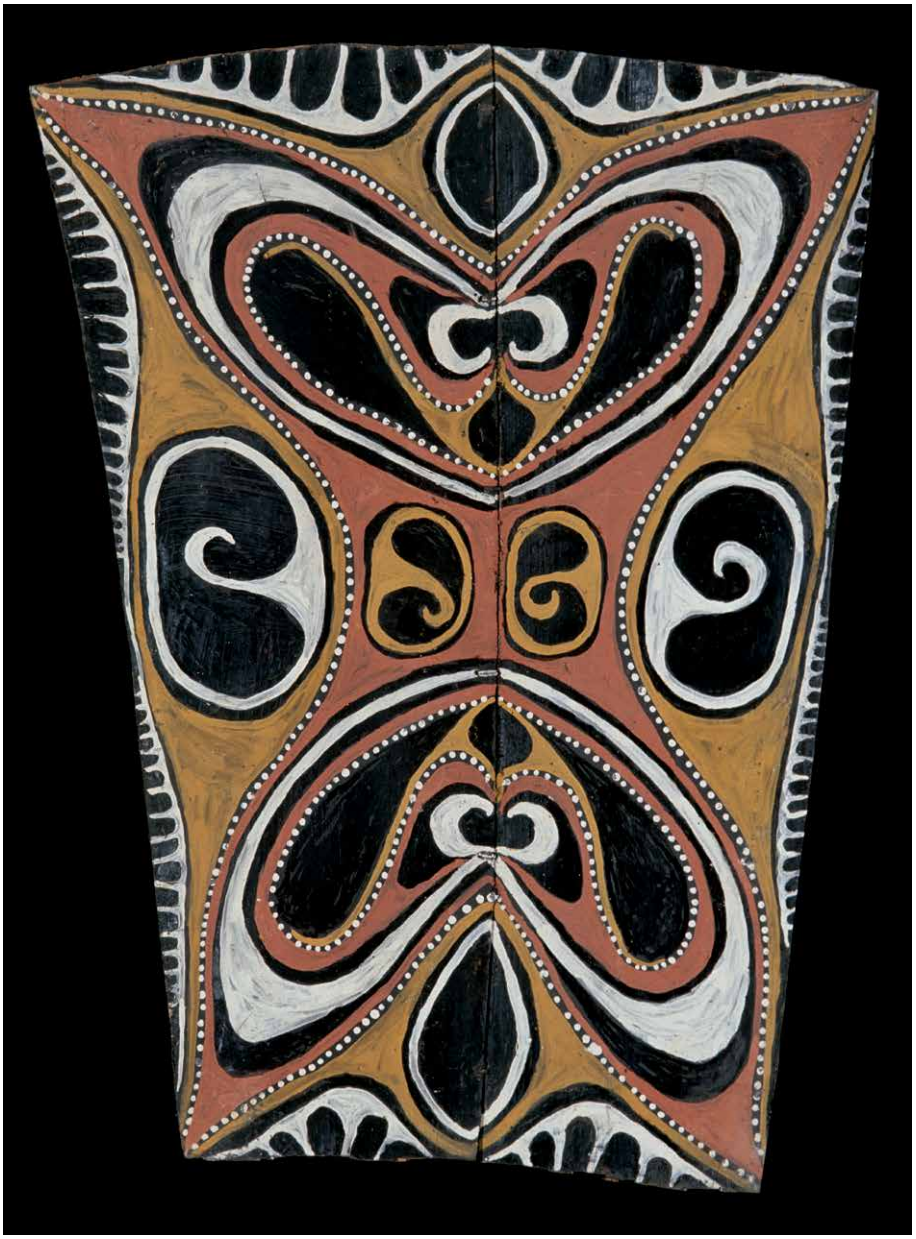

Figure 10.5. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Black millipede (*magiyakow*), Tek totem, 120.6 × 85.8 cm, 1978. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. cat. 2001.422.

Figure 10.5

This painting depicts the black millipede (see also Figure 10.17). The design is structured around two heart-shaped representations of the millipede's 'face' (or head). This is shown twice, once in the upper half of the bark and once, in mirror reflection, in the lower half. Each face is outlined by a heart-shaped solid white line and displays two large black pear-shaped eyes, a small ovoid black mouth and two curved white 'teeth' positioned between the eyes. The two teeth are represented in a form that evokes the highly prestigious shell nose ornaments which were formerly worn by warriors as a sign that they had killed members of enemy groups during intertribal warfare. The artist acknowledged that the black millipede does not 'bite' but stated that he gave the animal prominent teeth to indicate that it can inflict serious injury on people by 'spitting' a corrosive substance into their eyes. The animal has two prominent antennae (*boriina boriina*) on its head and in the painting these are represented by the pairs of yellow and white hook forms positioned inside black roundels in the centre of the design. The black pointed ovals in the centre of both the top and bottom of the bark represent the animal's long thick black body. The serpentine white lines with short white lines attached on the outer edges of the bark depict the animal's myriad short 'legs' (*yatii*).

The black millipede, one of the artist's totems, has a fearsome reputation not only because it is reputed to 'spit' a corrosive substance if disturbed but also because a myth, known throughout the Washkuk Hills, represents it as a killer and a cannibal. This myth, a version of which is also told by the neighbouring Kaunga (Bowden 2023a:178-182), describes how two brothers named Wantan and Mbapan migrated into the Washkuk Hills from the north. They built a settlement and invited the people they found in situ to a ceremony they staged. In the middle of the ceremony a band of Millipede Men, in the form of millipedes, unexpectedly arrived to participate in the festivities. But Mbapan, the younger and more hot-headed of the two brothers, was disgusted by the sight of them and publicly humiliated the millipedes by refusing to allow them to participate in the ceremony or give them a share of the food that had been prepared for the guests. Burning with resentment the millipedes retired to a nearby lagoon where they assumed the form of fish.

The next day the younger brother's wife and baby daughter travelled to the shallow lagoon to catch fish. The woman set her daughter down in a tub, made from a flexible sheet of palm spathe, put a little water in it and gave the child several small fish to play with. The woman then waded into the lagoon with her large hand net. When she was far from shore, the fish she had given her daughter transformed back into millipedes, crawled into the child's different orifices and set about devouring her from within. The woman saw the child gesticulating wildly but, being out of earshot, thought it was crying because it had been left alone. When she eventually returned with a bag full of fish she discovered that her child had been eaten. The fish she was carrying also then turned into millipedes and devoured her in turn. The woman had a female companion with her who, when she saw what was happening, feared that she too would be eaten. But the millipedes (who could speak) explained that she need not be afraid as they had no intention of hurting her. They devoured the other woman and her child, they explained, to take revenge on the man who had so publicly humiliated them. When the dead woman's husband learned of what had happened to his wife and daughter he immediately set out to take revenge. After finding the millipedes packed tightly together inside a hollow log, bloated with his wife and daughter's flesh, he attempted to burn them alive by setting fire to the log. The majority of the millipedes died in the conflagration but the band's leader and a handful of followers, who had supernormal powers, escaped through an underground tunnel into the nearby lagoon. There they took up residence in the spirit world beneath the water where they are said still to be located today.

The events summarised above form only a small part of those described in the myth of Wantan and Mbapan, but the fate of the woman and the child killed by the millipedes powerfully reminds listeners to the story of the need to extend hospitality equally to everyone attending a ceremony. In addition, the intentional shaming of people, such as by denying them hospitality, risks transforming potential friends into the bitterest of enemies.

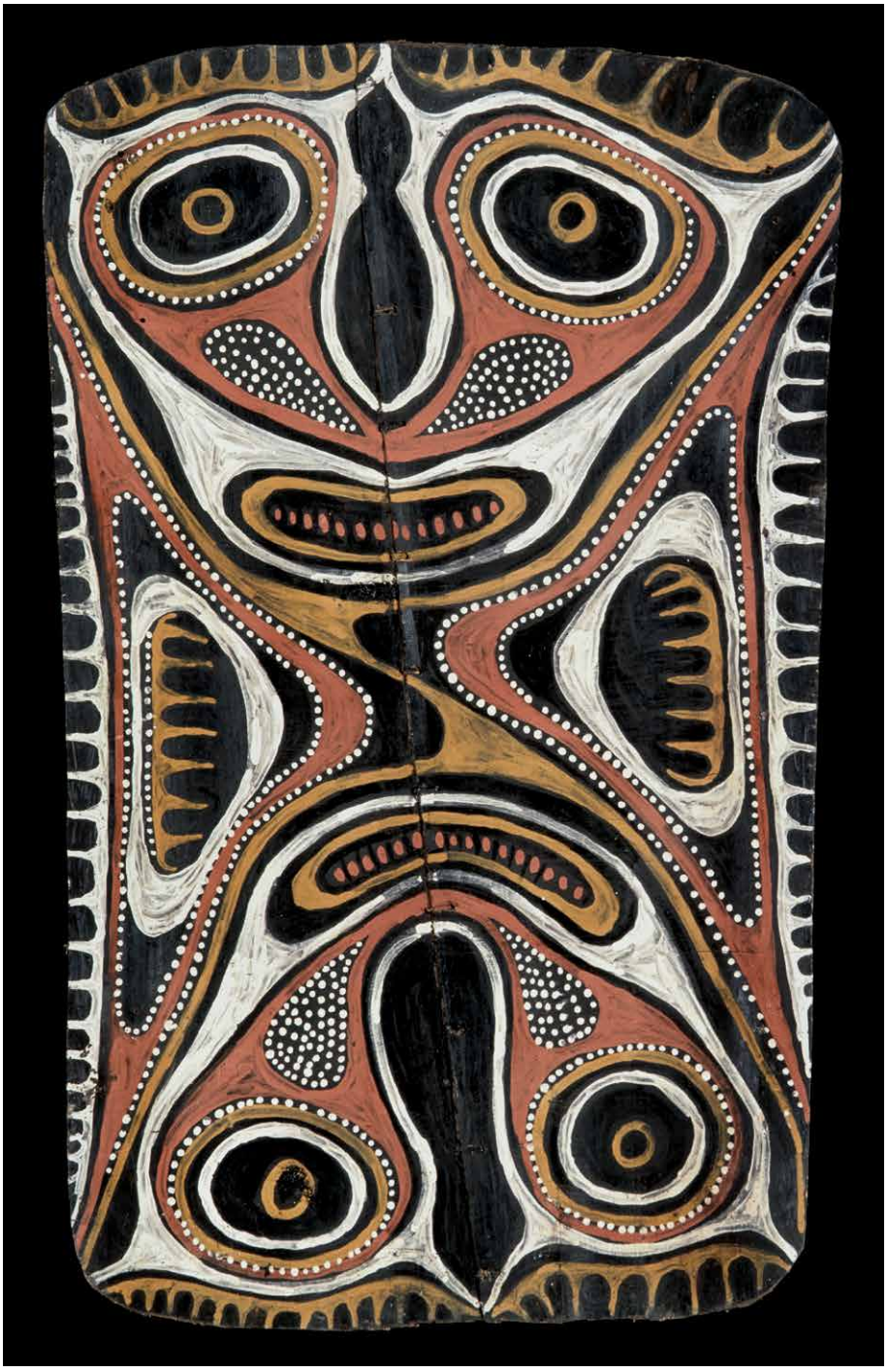

Figure 10.6. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. *Arokomaka* double-face design, not totemic, 116 × 71.9 cm, 1978. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.426.

Figure 10.6

This painting is a two-dimensional or 'graphic' version of a type of non-totemic double-headed design carved in large numbers on beams in ceremonial houses (for examples see Chapter 9). Heads of the same type, individually or in pairs, are also carved on the finials of slit-gongs. The two heads in this case, like their carved equivalents, are stylised but recognisably anthropomorphic. Each has a pair of staring black eyes, a large black nose and a prominent mouth. Many men describe the carved forms of these heads as purely decorative and non-representational. But others say they depict unnamed 'spirits' (*sikiyawas*, also called *aroko*). The motifs surrounding the two heads are non-representational.

Figure 10.7. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. *Bodi* tree fruit, Tek totem, 110.5 × 75 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.392.

Figure 10.7

The bark in Figure 10.7 depicts the fruit of one of several types of small tree collectively termed *bodi* (pronounced 'mbondi'). All varieties produce roughly spherical fruit the size and colour of small oranges. The fruit depicted here are those of the variety termed *mima bodi* (literally, 'female *bodi*'), one of the artist's clan totems. These fruit have a ring of protuberances close to the stalk – not shown in the painting – which are remarkably similar in form to the mature female breast, hence the tree's name. In the painting the fruit are represented by the black roundels outlined in red arranged in a column in the centre of the design. The other motifs are non-representational.

The *mima bodi* tree and its 'female' fruit are the subject of a well-known myth (see Bowden 1982, 1997:316-36). The story describes how a mature tree of this variety stood beside a ceremonial house in a village that had no women. Its male inhabitants, doomed to permanent bachelorhood, spent their days working in their gardens and processing sago without the assistance of wives and children. One day, after the men had all left the village to process sago in two different parts of the forest a strong breeze sprang up and shook the *bodi* tree, knocking all of its fruit on to the ground. The fruit shed their skins and transformed into women. The ripe, red fruit transformed into attractive women and the green fruit into less attractive ones. After transforming into humans the women began playing the slit-gongs in the adjacent men's house and dancing and singing as only men did during rituals. One of the two groups of men happened to be working closer to the village than the other and when they heard the drumming and singing immediately packed up their goods and hurried home to find out what was going on. Discovering that a large group of women had mysteriously appeared they promptly claimed all of them as wives and then joined in the singing and dancing. There were many more women than there were men in this group and most of the men obtained more than one wife. (Polygyny was, and still is, practised in this society.) When the other men returned home later that day they initially stood and stared in astonishment at what they found. They then asked the men in the first group to give them their excess wives. The others agreed to do so but only if they 'paid' (*toko*) for the women with substantial quantities of shell valuables (*ya*). The men in the second group agreed to do so and each made a separate bridewealth payment for one woman. When all of the men in the second group had also obtained wives they took their new companions back to their houses where the different couples joyfully began married life together.

Kwoma say that the men described in this myth established the practice of making bridewealth (= brideprice) payments for wives. These payments, both men and women say, acknowledge the valuable roles that women play in men's lives domestically and economically: they provide men with female companions and sexual partners, and give them legal control over the children that result from the marriages. A wife is also a hard worker who helps her husband maintain his house and works alongside him in his gardens and processing sago. Given the great value of a woman in these contexts, Kwoma say, it would be 'absurd' for a man to 'give' a sister or daughter away in marriage to another 'for nothing'. The gift of a woman in marriage to another man, therefore, must always be reciprocated with a substantial quantity of wealth. In this society it is not permitted directly to exchange women in marriage – by giving a sister (or daughter) for a wife. (For a more detailed analysis of this myth see Bowden 1982; see also Bowden 1983b.)

Bodi fruit are one of the most commonly depicted entities in bark paintings, and representations of them remind men of their obligations to 'pay' for their wives. In the Washkuk Hills a bridewealth payment is not made before a marriage takes place but as soon as possible afterwards. If the husband has little wealth, and only a few clansmen to help him, the payment might not take place for several years. However, the payment cannot be delayed indefinitely for until it is made any children resulting from the marriage legally belong to the wife's clan.

Figure 10.8. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. (Left) Snail (*wawiyam*), Wanyi totem, 130 × 49 cm, 1988. (Right) Waterlily flowers (*ukuba she*), Keyava totem, 125 × 50 cm, 1988.

Figure 10.8

The two paintings illustrated in Figure 10.8 are examples of 'single' barks. Each is painted on a sheet cut from a single sago palm leafstalk. The one on the left depicts a garden snail. The animal is represented schematically with its anatomical features disarticulated and divided between the different sections of the design. In the upper section the artist has depicted what he described as the snail's 'face' (*misoma*): this includes a pair of large black eyes, a long black nose and a small black mouth with a row of yellow teeth. The two black pointed ovals on either side of the mouth and the other motifs in this section are non-representational. The central section of the design depicts the snail's two retractable antennae, entities which the artist identified as its 'tongues' (*tariikwoy*). These are represented in white and have finger-like appendages on their ends. The two antennae are shown a total of four times: twice on each side of the design. There is a small highly stylised face in the lower section of the bark; this is composed of two eyes (the two hook forms, one with a black roundel and the other with a white teardrop form at its centre), a black nose (the pointed oval) and a curved 'mouth'. This face, the artist stated, does not represent any particular entity but was added to fill out the design.

The painting on the right depicts waterlily flowers. Waterlilies grow in abundance on the lagoons and swamps that surround the Washkuk Hills and their seeds are eaten. This painting depicts the plant's showy flowers which are arranged in columns on the sides of the bark. The lowest pair double as the eyes of a stylised anthropomorphic 'face', other features of which include a nose in the form of a black pointed oval, and a large heart-shaped mouth. The artist said that this face was non-representational and was added only 'to fill an empty space at the bottom of the bark'. Before European contact Kwoma made very limited use of canoes and predominantly obtained waterlily seeds and other edible aquatic plants through trade with neighbouring peoples on the Sepik, who collected them from their canoes. Today, Kwoma men and women make extensive use of canoes to fish in lagoons but they lack the canoeing skills of their neighbours on the Sepik and still obtain the bulk of plant materials of river origin through trade. (For an account of this inter-ethnic trade see Bowden 1991, 2023a:178-185.)

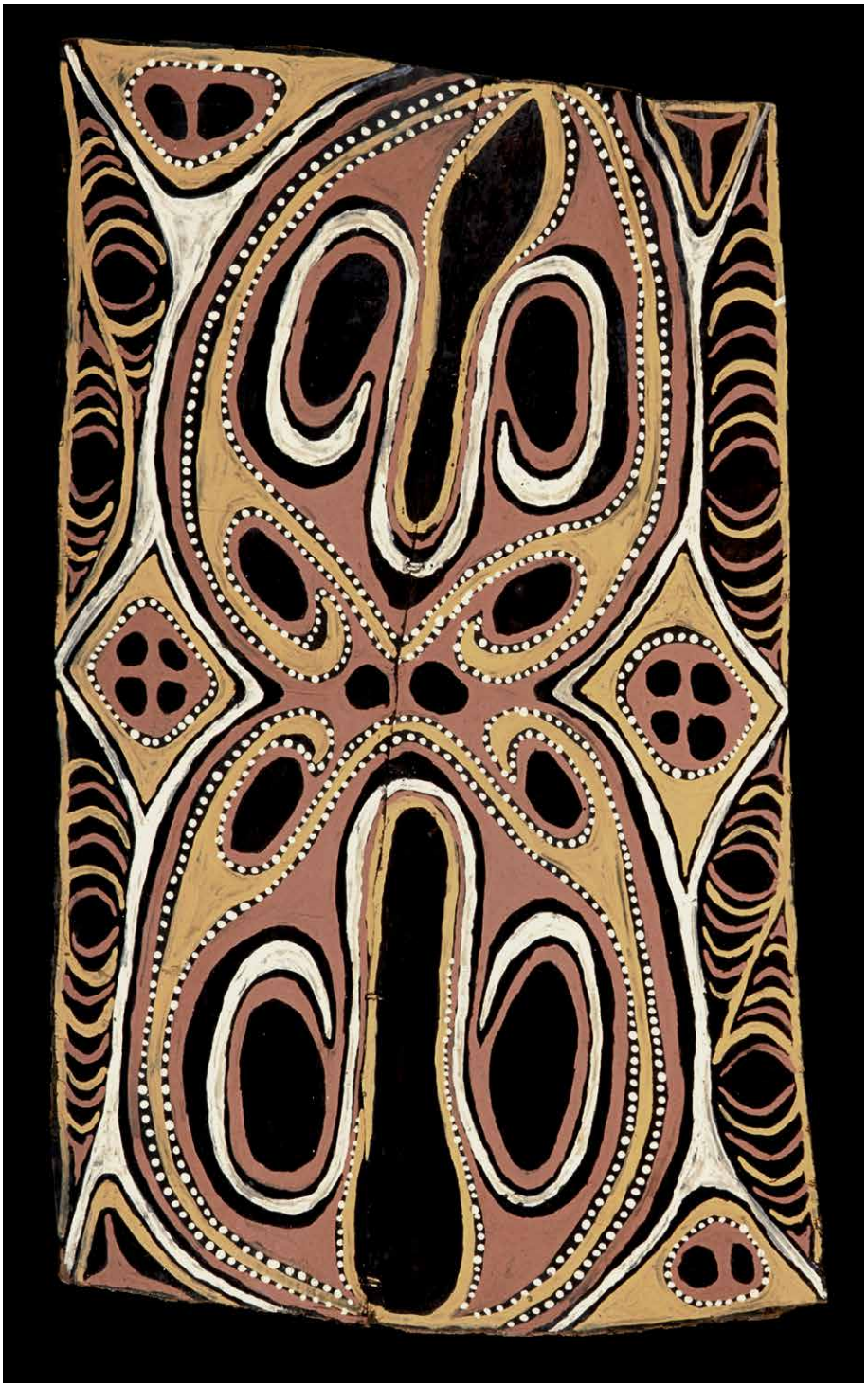

Figure 10.9. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Scorpion (*mediigiiriigiirii*), Tek totem, 115.6 × 76.5 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.421.

Figure 10.9

The painting in Figure 10.9 depicts a scorpion, one of the artist's clan totems. The animal has been given a huge anthropomorphic 'face' which is shown twice, once in the upper half of the design and once, in mirror reflection, in the lower. Scorpions are typically found under bark and in decaying litter when people are working in their gardens or in sago forests. The animal has a powerful sting in the end of its tail which the artist has here represented in the centre of the bark in the form of a pair of yellow hook forms underneath its 'nose'. In commenting on the painting Yatiikapa said that he was well aware that the scorpion's sting is located in its tail but when he was designing the bark he could not resolve to his satisfaction how to depict both the animal's 'face' and its long tail with the stinging barbs at its end. He decided, therefore, to place the sting under the nose and represent it in the form of dangerous-looking 'teeth' (*pu*). The various motifs distributed around the two ovoid heads are non-representational.

Figure 10.10. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. (Left) Larva of *me poko ow* insect, Tek totem, 116 × 38 cm, 1988. (Right) Butterfly (*aposiibiiruka*), Tek totem, 120 × 47 cm, 1988.

Figure 10.10

The 'single' bark on the left in Figure 10.10 depicts a large edible grub termed *me poko ow*. These grubs (*ow*) grow up to ten centimetres in length and a centimetre or more in thickness. They are similar in size and appearance to the Australian 'witchetty' grub. They are found in rotting rattan of the *me poko* variety and other woody materials lying on the forest floor. The grubs are a highly prized as a food and are baked wrapped in leaves. In the painting, the head of the larva is shown at the narrow end of the bark. It has been given a pair of clearly delineated eyes as well as a mouth. The black ovoid forms arranged in a column in the centre of the design represent the grub's long segmented body. The five scroll forms on each side depict its numerous short legs.

The painting on the right depicts a mature butterfly of the *nokumay* variety, one of many varieties of butterfly 'owned' by the artist's clan. Butterflies abound in the Washkuk Hills. They include several varieties of Birdwings, the largest butterfly in the Australasian region (D'Abrera 1971:48-49, 62-3). In the painting the insect has been disarticulated and is represented in two sections. In the upper half of the design the butterfly is represented by means of a mask-like or 'butterfly-hinge' motif. This consists of three parts: two large black triangular forms outlined by solid white lines which represent the insect's wings; a pair of black roundels which correspond to circular markings on it wings; and a pair of black pointed ovals between the two wings which represent the insect's body (thorax and abdomen). According to the artist, the lower half of the design depicts the insect's 'face' (*misoma*). Oriented towards the bottom of the bark this highly stylised face displays two large 'eyes' (the black roundels with a line of yellow dashes in their centres), a long black proboscis ('nose') positioned between the two eyes, a pair of curved white antennae flanking the lower half of the nose, and a large upturned 'mouth'. This variety of butterfly is grammatically 'female' (*mima*) and the term for it, '*nokumay*', is used as a woman's name.

Figure 10.11. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Painting based on a design the artist saw on a lime container while visiting a Iatmul-speaking village on the Sepik; not totemic, 109.8 × 73 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.424.

Figure 10.11

According to the artist, this painting is based on a design that is not indigenous to the Washkuk Hills but has been borrowed, since European contact, from neighbouring Iatmul-speaking peoples on the Sepik River. (For Iatmul examples see Kelm 1966-68, vol. 1, Plate 489). Today, the motif is widely used in Kwoma paintings on bark to depict a variety of entities, including butterflies and butterfly cocoons (e.g. Figures 10.34 and 10.35). In this painting, however, the motif has been used to depict the Iatmul design itself. Yatiikapa reported that he first saw an example of this design, incised in low relief on a gourd lime container, while visiting Aibom, a Iatmul-speaking village in the Chambri Lakes (see Figure 10.12). This village is a source of pottery traded widely throughout the central section of the Sepik (May and Tuckson 1982; Mead 1950). Yatiikapa visited the village in the company of a number of other Kwoma men to buy large sago-storage vessels. Prior to the suppression of warfare in this region, following the Second World War, it was unsafe to visit this village and Kwoma obtained these large pots through trade with intermediaries, principally Manambu speakers on the Sepik. The artist said that he did not know what the design on the gourd he saw at Aibom depicted, and had not thought to ask.

Yatiikapa used a variant of the same design to depict the butterfly in the upper half of the painting on the right in Figure 10.10.

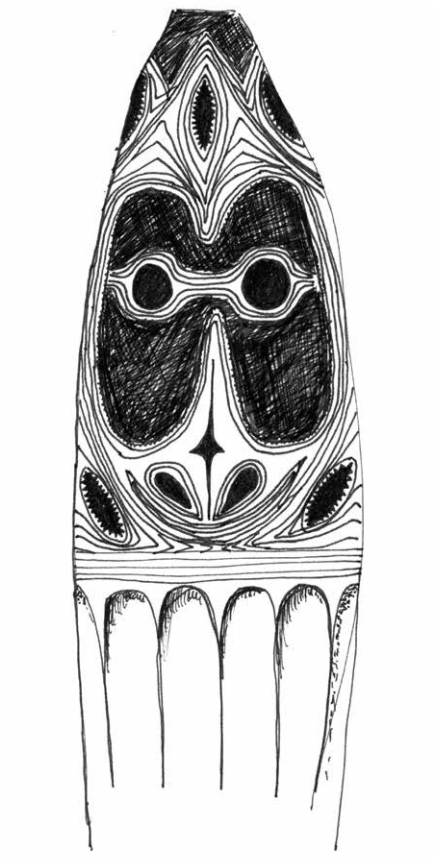

Figure 10.12. Incised design on the upper half of a lime gourd, Iatmul language group. Gourd 9 cm wide (approx.). Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, cat. 35.94. Drawing by the author, 1983.

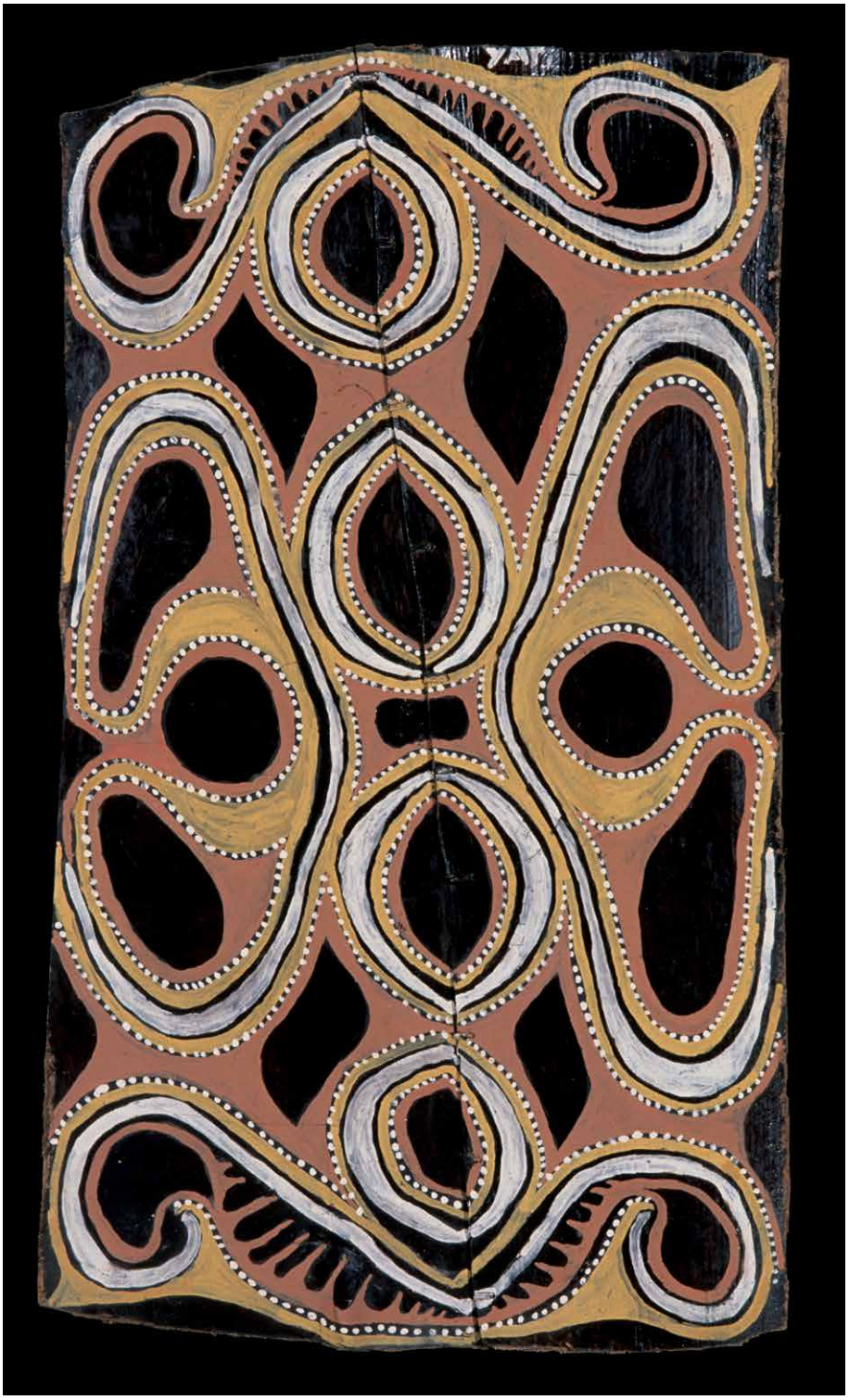

Figure 10.13. Yatiikapa, Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis. Spirit in the form of a *hopoma* python named Nggawukumbu owned by the Tek totemic division, 120.5 × 69.2 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.428.

Figure 10.13

The subject of this painting is a giant 'spirit' python (*hopoma*) named Nggawukumbu. The giant snake is represented non-figuratively with its different parts disarticulated anatomically. The four black pointed ovals arranged in a column in the centre of the design depict, from the top, the animal's 'heart' (*mesek*), 'lungs' (*hiiriibu*), 'gall bladder' (*wopu*) and 'kidneys' *(magiir wuwu siik*). The two large kidney-shaped forms outlined in white, yellow and red on the two sides of the design are the animal's skin (*sapi*) which it sheds regularly. The other motifs are non-representational.

Kwoma report that pythons live in large numbers in the most inaccessible parts of the Washkuk Hills, especially in swampy areas overgrown with thorny vines which even hunting dogs cannot penetrate. Such densely forested and impenetrable parts of the Hills are also believed to be the homes of many supernatural pythons, one of which is depicted here. Pythons are excellent tree-climbers and emerge from their lairs at night to hunt, both high up in the forest canopy and on the forest floor. In the canopies of fruit-bearing trees they lie in wait for flying foxes seeking food. Dead or wounded flying foxes lying on the ground underneath a tall tree heavily laden with fruit is a sign that a python has recently been hunting and inadvertently dropped some of its prey. Small pythons occasionally enter villages at night in search of roosting chickens. Python meat is a traditional food.

The 'spirit' animal depicted in this painting is believed to have its home in a stream named Minggiyatuku close to Bangwis village. Both men and women bathe in this stream and commonly report that they catch glimpses of Nggawukumbu when they duck their heads under the water. The artist stated that shortly before he produced this painting a child claimed that the python had tried to catch and kill him when he was bathing, by attempting wrap to its giant body around him. The largest pythons are said to be capable of catching and killing small pigs and dogs and, at least in myths, are described as occasionally catching and eating children.

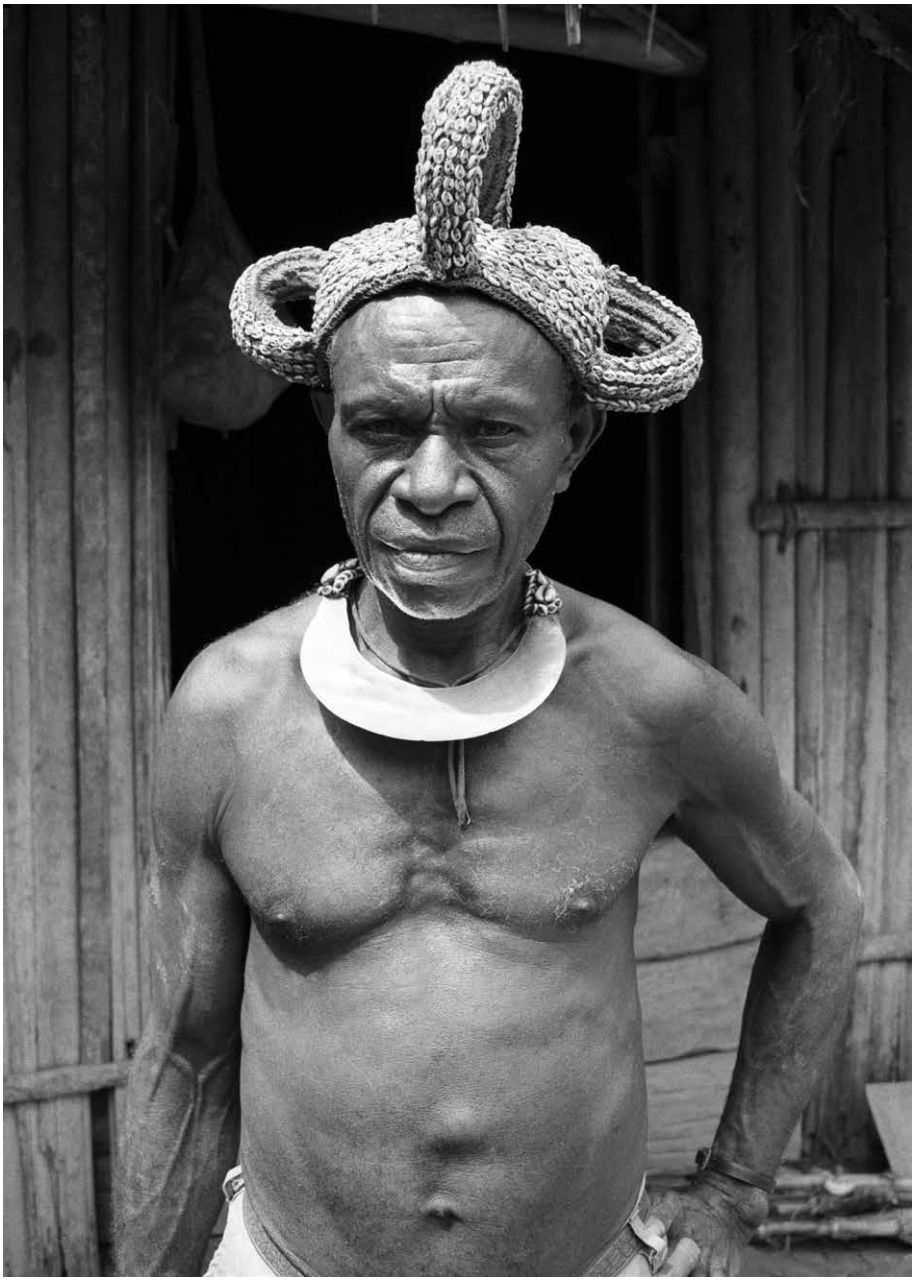

Figure 10.14. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis village, wearing one form of traditional men's headgear and a mother of pearl neck pendant, 1982. Traditionally the shells used to make these decorations were obtained through trade with neighbouring river peoples. (See also the commentary on the painting in Figure 11.34.)

Wachongg

Biographical note

Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis village, was born in the second half of the 1920s. He died in the 1990s. He was my primary Kwoma research assistant. Like many other highly skilled painters and carvers, Wachongg was also a master storyteller and songman. He was one of the last members of his community who had a detailed knowledge of the complex poetic language in which the song versions of myths were performed. His first instructor in this poetic language was his father Wonyi'ow, who died around the Second World War after being gored by a wounded boar while hunting. His principal instructor in painting was one of his clan 'fathers' named Payip, who died in the late 1960s. Payip was one of the principal contributors of sculptures and paintings used to decorate Wayipanal men's house, which was constructed in the second half of the 1960s (Figure 2.1). According to the artist, his name is a colloquial form of 'Wachii'ow'. This the term for a type of shrub but literally means 'breadfruit-tree grub' (*wachii*, breadfruit tree; *ow*, grub). He said that he was given this name, with his parents' approval, by a man belonging to the Wurambanj tribe, whose clan is one of the owners of the breadfruit tree totem, who happened to be visiting his parents the night he was born.

Parents often give their children names that parallel, and rhyme with, those of clan forebears. The 'elaborated' form of the artist's name: 'Wachii'ow', is a case in point. It parallels his father's name: 'Wonyi'ow', which literally means '*wonyi*-tree grub'. The *wonyi* tree is a totem of the Tek division. Both of these names parallel that of his father's father: 'Meer'ow', which literally means '*meer*-tree grub'. The *meer* tree is a totem of the artist's clan. Meer'ow, who died in the 1920s shortly after first contact, was the maker of the clay pot illustrated in Figure 2.13. Wachongg inherited this pot from his father and subsequently sold it to me. It is now in the National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne, Australia).

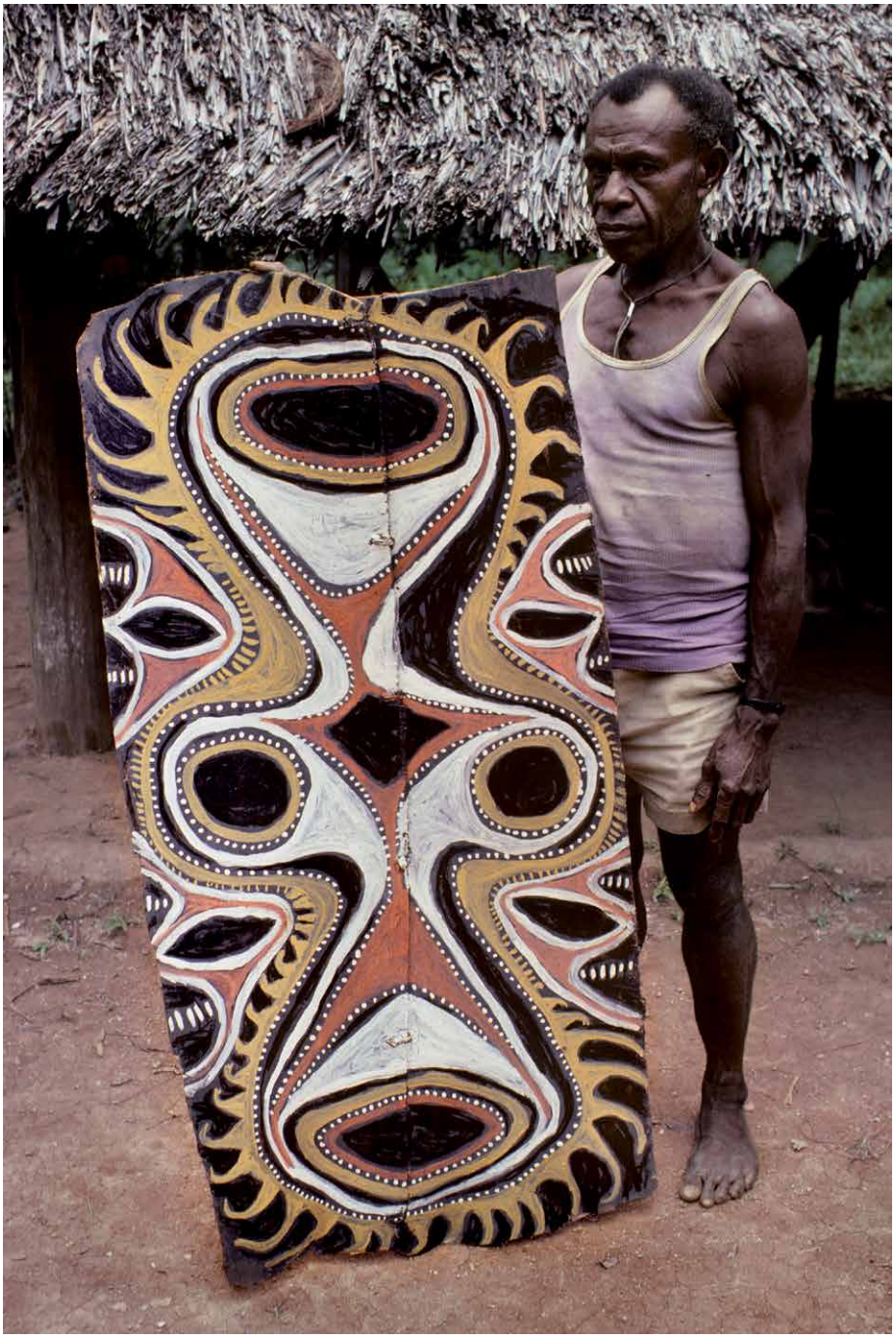

Figure 10.15. Wachongg, Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Large boulders on an area of land owned by the artist's clan in the northern half of the Washkuk Hills, 120 × 70 cm (approx.), 1982. Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery.

Figure 10.15

The four black roundels in this bark show different aspects of two house-sized boulders located on land owned by the artist's clan in the northern half of the Washkuk Hills. The area of land is named Kiriikumeyimbi. Each boulder is identified with a male spirit (*sikiyawas*) after which it is named. The two large roundels at the top and bottom of the design respectively represent the parts of the boulders visible above ground; the two smaller roundels correspond to their underground or non-visible parts. The boulder depicted at the top of the painting is named Wasambar; the other Guminoku. These names are among those given to male children belonging to the clan that owns the land on which the rocks are situated.

The black lozenge shape in the centre of the bark depicts what the artist described as the 'solid mass' or 'core' (*nedii*) of the two boulders. The two black pointed ovals enclosed within red curvilinear forms on each side of the design represent small bats of a type named *apopeya*. These roost during the day in deep crevices in the boulders but emerge at dawn and dusk to dart around and catch insects on the wing.

Like all supernatural beings associated with natural objects, the spirits that give their names to these two boulders are reported to be intensely 'irritated' if people treat them 'disrespectfully', such as by casually touching the objects they occupy or mentioning their names without simultaneously offering them a small sacrifice, such as leaves from totemic plants owned by the clan to which the spirits belong. An 'irritated' spirit can bring misfortune of some kind on the culprit, such as by causing them to have a serious accident. The artist stated that when people visit this area they often later dream of seeing one or other of these two spirits, who might inform them that the boulders they passed are not 'mere rocks' but the homes of powerful supernatural beings.

Before about 1945, when members of the artist's clan moved to Bangwis village, Wachongg's group had its main settlement in the northern half of the Washkuk range close to the area where these rocks are located. Today this area is too distant for the group's members to use for hunting or gardening on a regular basis but they still claim ownership of it. By depicting these two boulders in his painting, and by asserting that he needed no-one's permission to do so, the artist was reaffirming his clan's ownership of the land on which they are located.

Figure 10.16. Wachongg, Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Butterfly (*aposiibiiruka*), Tek totem, 138.8 × 69.3 cm, 1973. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.388.

Figure 10.16

The painting in Figure 10.16 depicts one of the brilliantly coloured giant butterflies that abound in the Washkuk Hills (see also Figure 10.10). Here the artist has depicted the insect by means of its wings (*chepi*) and a stylised but recognisably anthropomorphic 'face' (*misoma*). The face is shown twice, once in the upper half of the design and once, reflected across a horizontal mirror line, in the lower half. Each face displays a pair of large black 'eyes' (the pair of black roundels close to each end of the bark), a 'nose' (*sumojii*) in the form of a black pointed oval outlined in white and bisected by a red bar, and a curved 'mouth' (*kuja*) outlined in white, the corners of which touch the sides of the bark. The butterfly's brilliantly coloured wings are represented in the centre of the painting by the pair of large triangular forms painted in yellow, red and white, the apexes of which meet on the central long axis.

The butterfly is not a totem of the artist's clan but it is owned by other groups in the village in which the artist lived, including the one to which his wife belonged. Apart from totems owned by their own groups, the entities that artists depict most commonly in bark paintings are totems owned by other clans in their own villages.

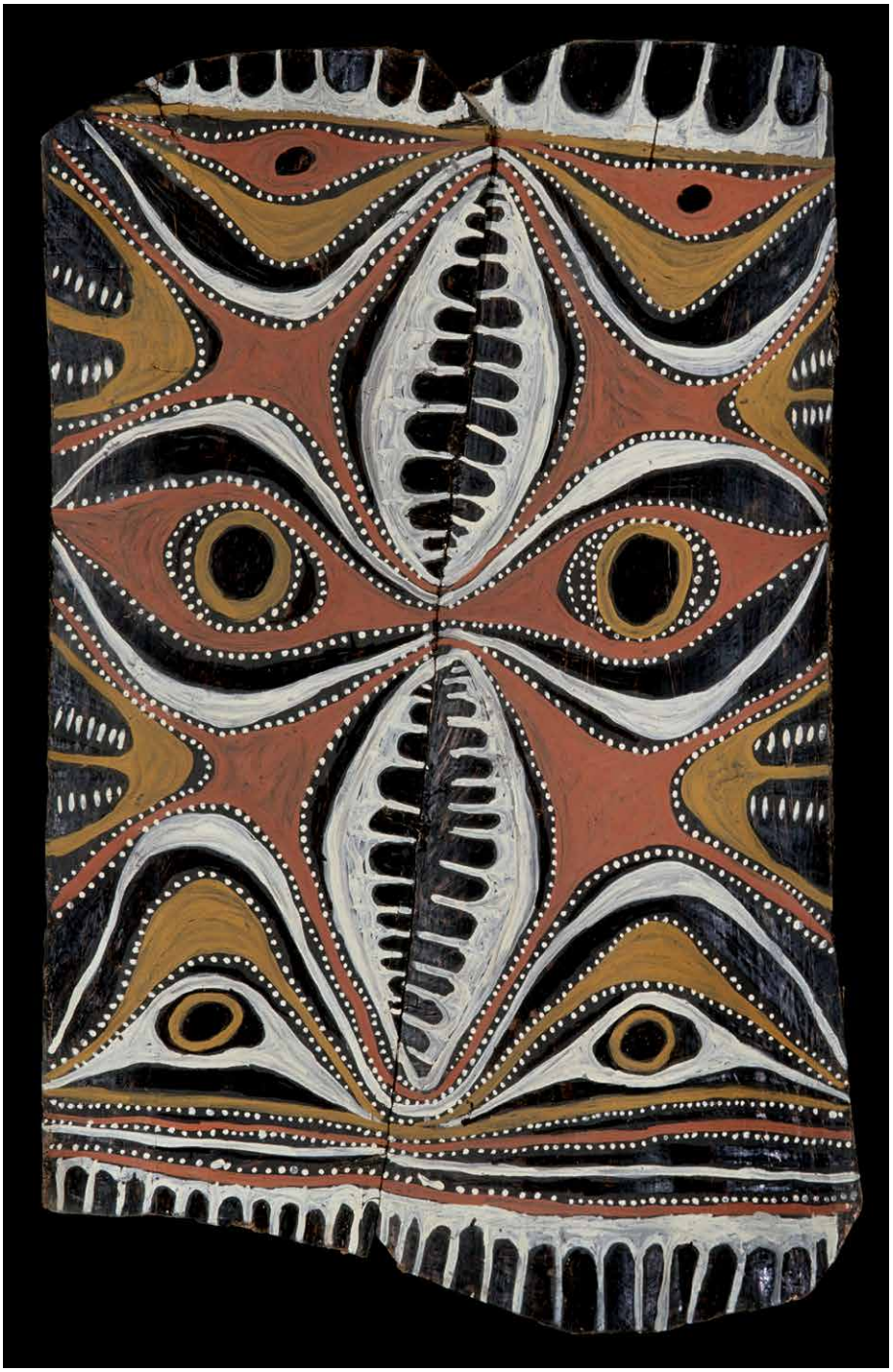

Figure 10.17. Wachongg, Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Black millipede (*magiyakow*), Tek totem, 127.8 × 83.5 cm, 1978. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.391.

Figure 10.17

This painting represents a black millipede (see also Figure 10.5). The animal is depicted by means of several anatomical features that have been disarticulated and recombined non-figuratively. The two black roundels in the centre of the design represent the animal's 'eyes' (of which the animal, in fact, has no clear anatomical equivalent). The two black ovoid forms outlined in white on the central long axis depict its 'mouth', and the short horizontal white lines on the inner sides of these ovoid forms its 'teeth'. The short vertical lines, attached to horizontal white bands, at both the top and bottom of the design correspond to the animal's myriad short black legs.

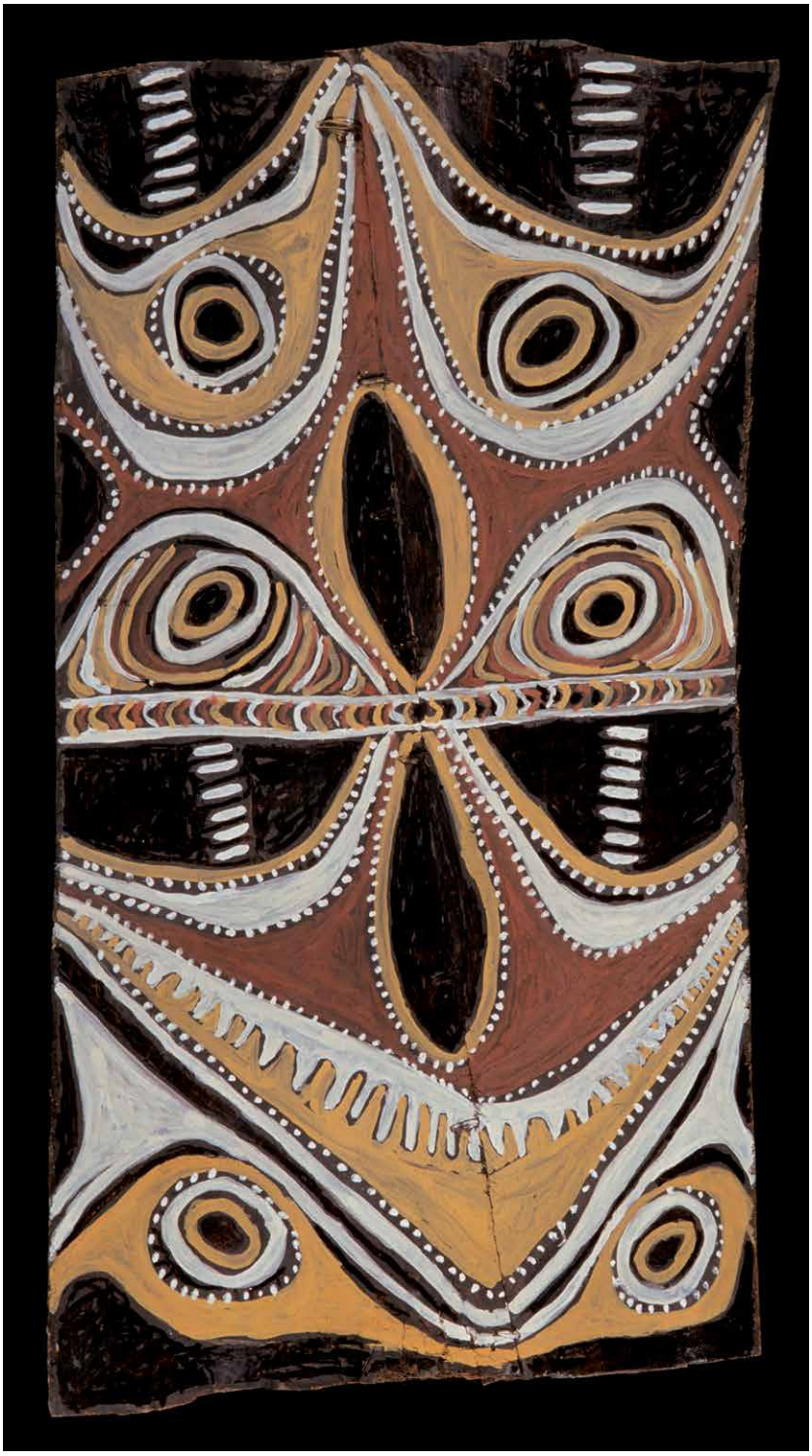

Figure 10.18. Wachongg, Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Leaf-eating insect (*mebiika sama*), Tek totem, 126 × 70 cm, 1988.

Figure 10.18

Figure 10.18 depicts a winged insect, named *mebiika sama*, resting on a leaf. The name literally means 'tree-leaf insect' (*me*, tree; *biika*, leaf; *sama*, winged insect). The animal is not a totem of the artist's clan but is owned by several of the other clans in the artist's village. The insect is depicted twice but in slightly different ways, once in the upper of the design and once in the lower half. The two representations are separated by a horizontal band of red, yellow and white chevrons. In both halves of the design the body parts represented have been disarticulated anatomically and recombined non-figuratively. According to the artist, the pairs of small black roundels closest to the two ends of the bark represent the insect's 'eyes'. The two black pointed ovals that meet in the centre of the design depict its 'nose', and the large V-shaped area of yellow at the bottom, with a white sawtooth motif on one side, its wings. In the upper half of the design the two semicircular forms attached to the central horizontal band are further representations of the insect's wings. These are outlined in white and filled with concentric circles painted in white, red and yellow. The other motifs are non-representational.

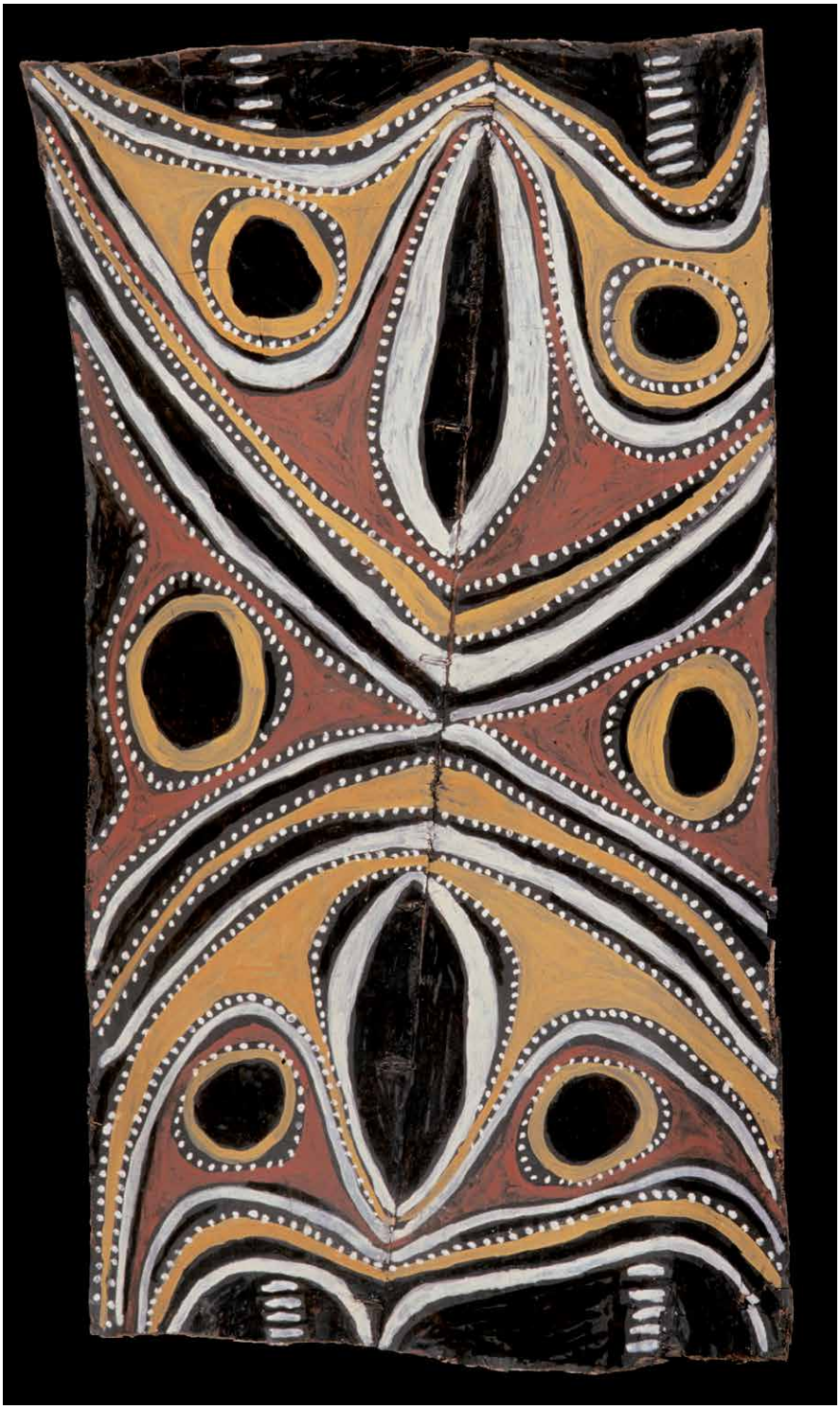

Figure 10.19. Wachongg, Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Sago-palm insect (*ow sama*), Tek totem, 123.3 × 69 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.413.

Figure 10.19

This painting is another representation of a type of winged insect (*sama*), in this case one found in association with sago palms – hence its name: *ow sama*, 'sago-palm insect'. '*Ow*' is an abbreviation (or possibly an archaic form) of '*noku*', 'sago palm'. Neither this insect nor the sago palm is owned by the artist's clan but both are totems of other clans in the artist's village. The insect is represented twice, once in the upper half of the bark and once in the lower. In both halves the animal has been given a stylised 'face' with prominent 'eyes' in the form of large black roundels. Surprisingly, the artist denied that the large black pointed ovals between the eyes represented the insect's 'nose' but claimed that they correspond to its abdomen – the larger half of its articulated body. Its thorax is represented by the two black roundels in the centre of each side.

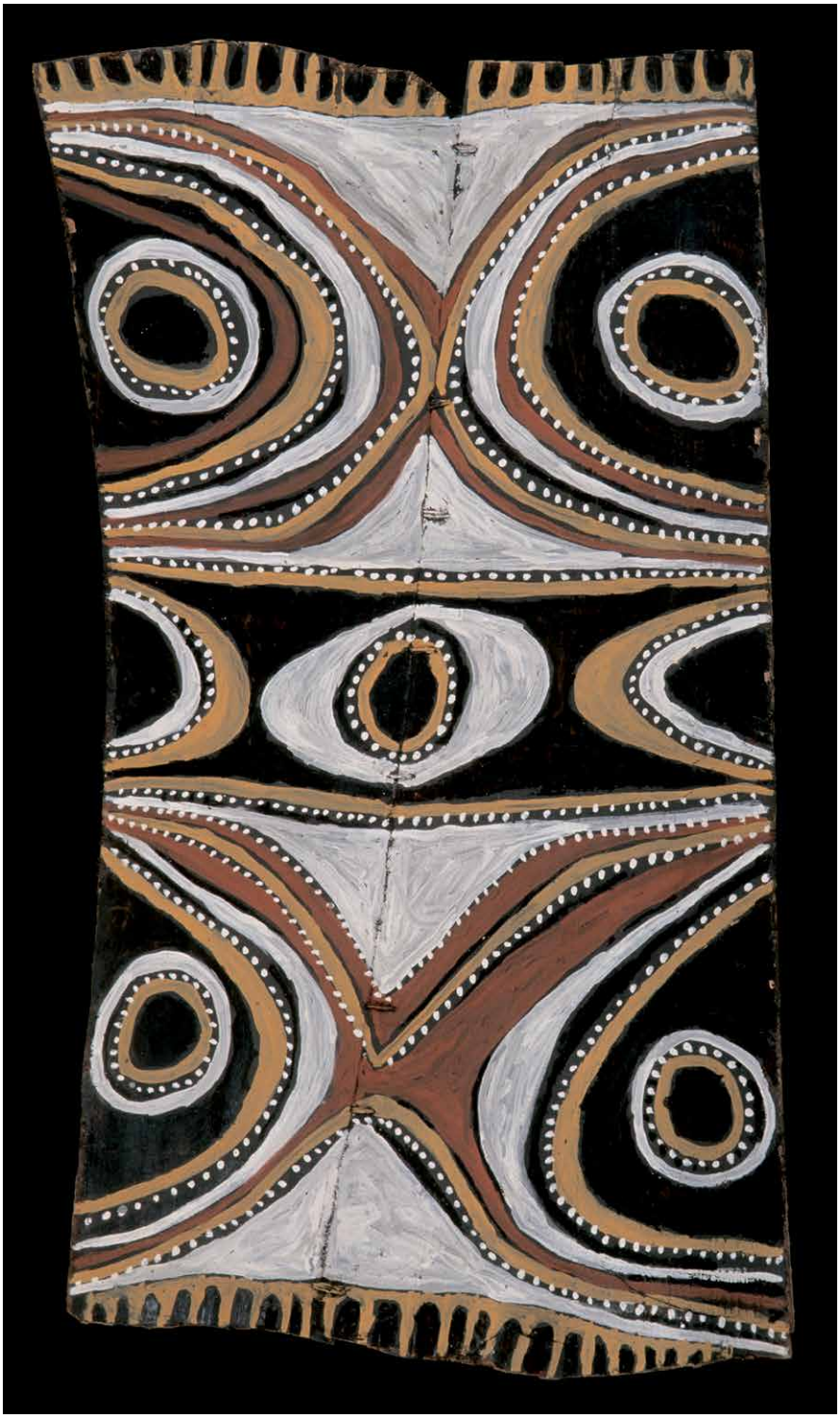

Figure 10.20. Wachongg, Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Water beetle (*uku'ayep*), Tek totem, 128.4 × 76.5 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.415.

Figure 10.20

The insect depicted in Figure 10.20 is a type of small black water beetle (*giyob*) that moves in a zigzag manner across the surface of forest pools. In this non-figurative design the insect is shown twice: once in the upper half of the bark and once in the lower. The body parts have been disarticulated anatomically. The pairs of black roundels in the upper and lower halves of the bark respectively represent the animal's 'eyes'. The concentric red, yellow and white semicircular lines that border each eye depict the insect's wings. The black oval outlined in white and yellow in the centre of the bark represents what the artist identified as the insect's prominent 'anal orifice'. Initially the artist described this insect as a totem of the Hamikwa totemic division but then changed his mind and said that it probably belonged to Tek. Others assigned it to the Keyava division, the group to which it is assigned here. Although unsure of who 'owned' the insect the artist said that its owners, whoever they were, would not object to him depicting it in a painting since he was not claiming that it belonged to his totemic group – Nggiley.

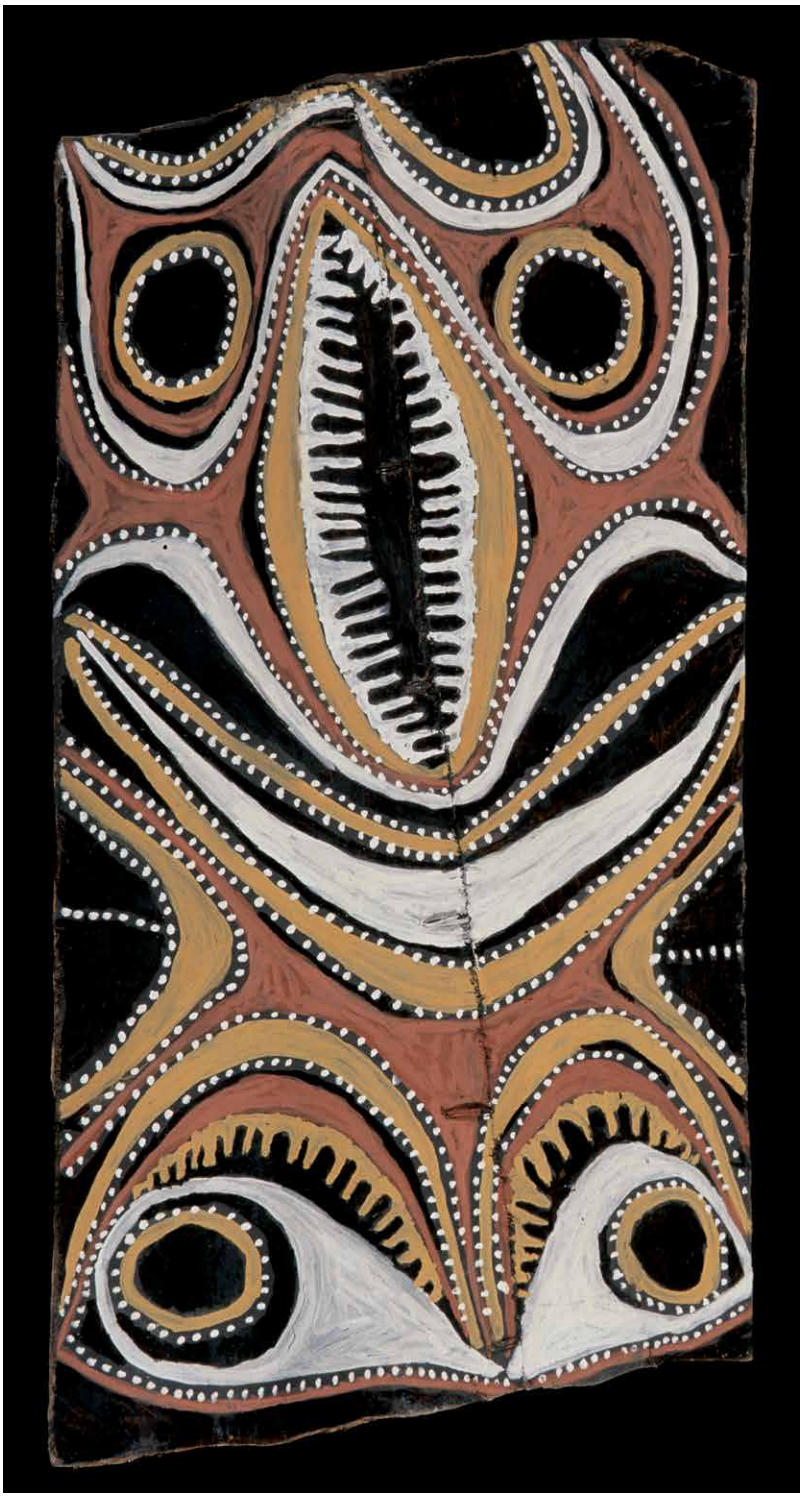

Figure 10.21. Wachongg, Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Shooting star (*maway*), not totemic, 125.1 × 69.7 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.418.

Figure 10.21

This painting depicts a shooting star. Shooting stars are not totemic, since no group 'owns' them, but they are a common subject of designs on bark. As noted earlier, Kwoma believe that shooting stars (*maway*) are the souls (*mayi*) of powerful men who have recently died flying through the night sky from the villages in which they lived to their final resting places in the underworld beneath one or other of the lagoons that flank the Washkuk Hills. These flying souls take the form of the men they once were and in paintings, such as the one illustrated, are typically given an anthropomorphic face, even if highly stylised. When a flying soul reaches a lagoon it is thought to briefly alight in one of the tall trees growing next to it and then plunge headfirst into the still water. There one of the man's predeceased terminological 'mothers', such as an actual mother or mother's sister, catches it in a woman's large hand-held fishing net and guides it down to the subaquatic underworld where it will live on, in human form, as a 'ghost' (*gaba*) in the company of other deceased clan members.

In this painting the greater part of the design is taken up with a representation of the flying soul's face. This possesses two large black eyes (the black roundels outlined in yellow), a large black ovoid nose (outlined in yellow and white sawtooth motif), and a wide upward-turning mouth. The artist identified the two black roundels outlined in yellow and white at the bottom of the design as representations of the deceased man's 'bones'. In this society it is customary for the surviving sons (or clan equivalents) of a very prominent man to preserve the longest of his leg bones, skull and jaw. Leg bones are made into daggers which are incised and worn ceremonially hanging from the back of the neck (see Bowden 2023a:117; see also Whiting 1941:144). Formerly, corpses were initially exposed on burial platforms constructed next to the deceased's house. When the body had completely decomposed the bones would be recovered and those not required for some purpose would be broken up and buried in the earth floor of the deceased's house. Today the exposure of corpses on burial platforms is not legally permitted. Instead, bodies are buried in shallow graves. When a body has decomposed the bones that are required for some purpose are recovered and the remainder reburied in a deeper, permanent grave (Bowden 1997:117-18).

Figure 10.22. Wachongg, Nggiley clan, Bangwis. Double-face design (*me maka*), not totemic, 115.7 × 64.1 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne., cat. 2001.419.

Figure 10.22

This painting is a graphic (two-dimensional) representation of one of several types of paired anthropomorphic faces carved in low relief on the major eaves beams in men's houses (see Chapter 9 for illustrations). The type of paired face in this case is the one named *me maka*. As in the carved versions, the two faces reflect each other across a horizontal mirror line and touch (or nearly touch) at their chins. The two faces are so highly stylised they are almost unrecognisable. Each heart-shaped face is outlined in white and occupies one half of the design. Each has a pair of black eyes and a large V-shaped black nose. A serpentine yellow line outlines the nose. The coiled ends of this same line frame the two eyes. The black roundel outlined in red and yellow above the eyes represents what the artist described as the figure's 'forehead' (*makabe*).

Figure 10.23. The Bangwis village painter Manal Kapay working on a 'double' bark depicting a totemic insect (see also Figures 4.7 and 4.8), 1982.

Manal Kapay

Biographical note

Manal Kapay of Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis village, was born in the 1920s. He died in the 1990s. He was one of his village's most accomplished painters and sculptors. Like other leading artists, Kapay was an active contributor of barks and sculptures to new men's houses, both in his own and other villages. His artistic talents were publicly acknowledged by other members of his village when they asked him to take overall charge of decorating the interior of the new ceremonial house named Minjawolar, constructed on the western side of the village in the early 1980s (Figure 5.1). Like the other two Bangwis village men's houses standing in the village at the time – Wayipanal and Nggeyasatuk – this was a masterpiece of vernacular architecture. But like all men's houses it eventually came to the end of its life and was demolished in the early 2000s.

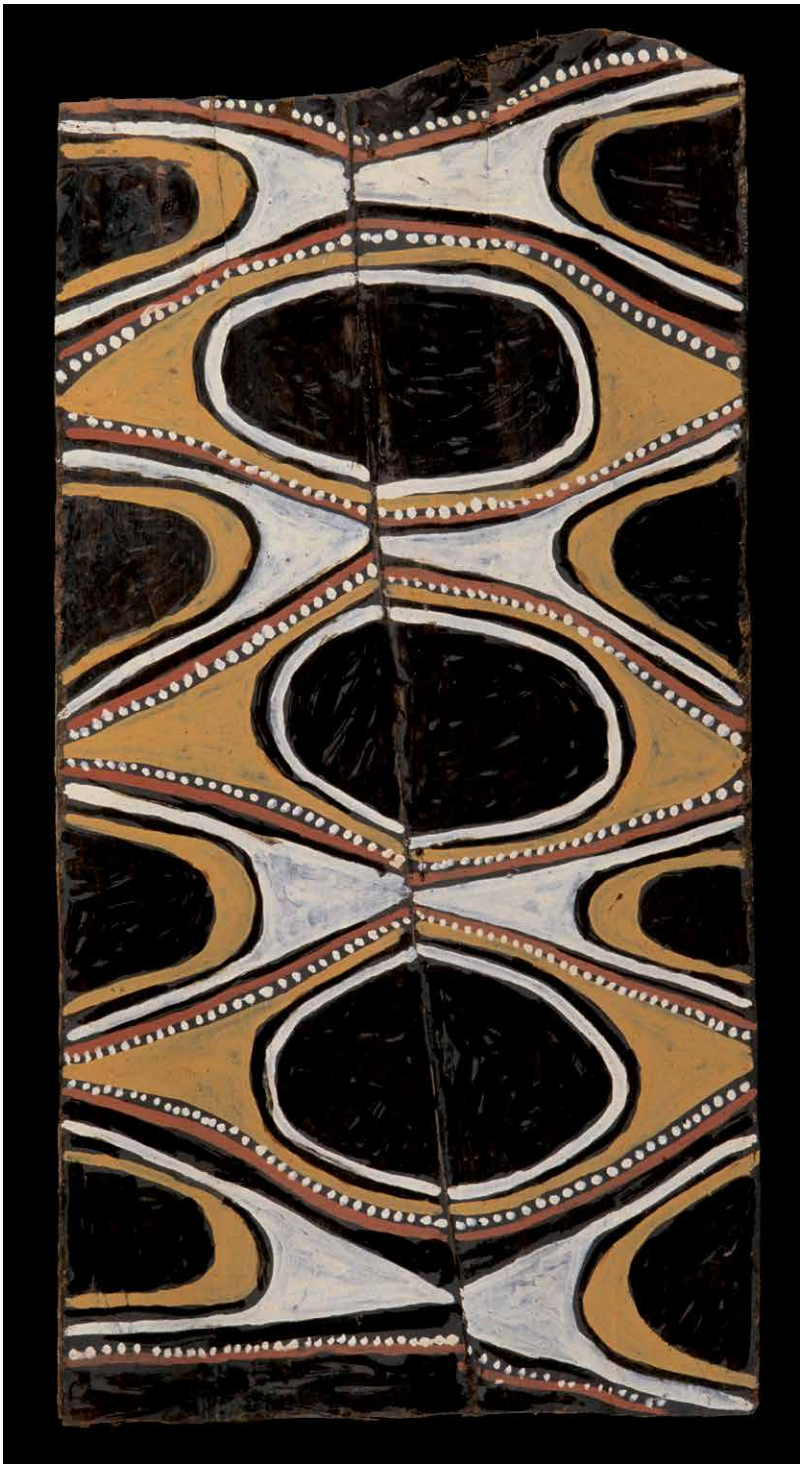

Figure 10.24. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Boulder inhabited by a forest spirit named Mbutakom; both the boulder and the spirit are owned by the artist's clan, 124 × 63.4 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.406.

Figure 10.24

The three large black roundels arranged in a column in the centre of this painting are different representations of a gigantic boulder located on land owned by the artist's clan in the northern half of the Washkuk Hills. Like many other unusual rock formations the boulder is believed to be one of the dwelling places of a spirit, in this case one named Mbutakom. The boulder takes its name from this spirit. Like all supernatural beings associated with natural objects, the spirit that occupies this rock formation is believed to be 'irritated' by 'disrespectful' behaviour in its vicinity, such as by people casually mentioning its name. Forest spirits react to such disrespectful behaviour by afflicting the person responsible with misfortune of some kind, such as a serious accident. Apart from the three black roundels the motifs in this painting are non-representational. Claiming ownership of a well-known entity such as the boulder Mbutakom and depicting it in a painting is one way in which an artist affirms his clan's title to the land on which it is located.

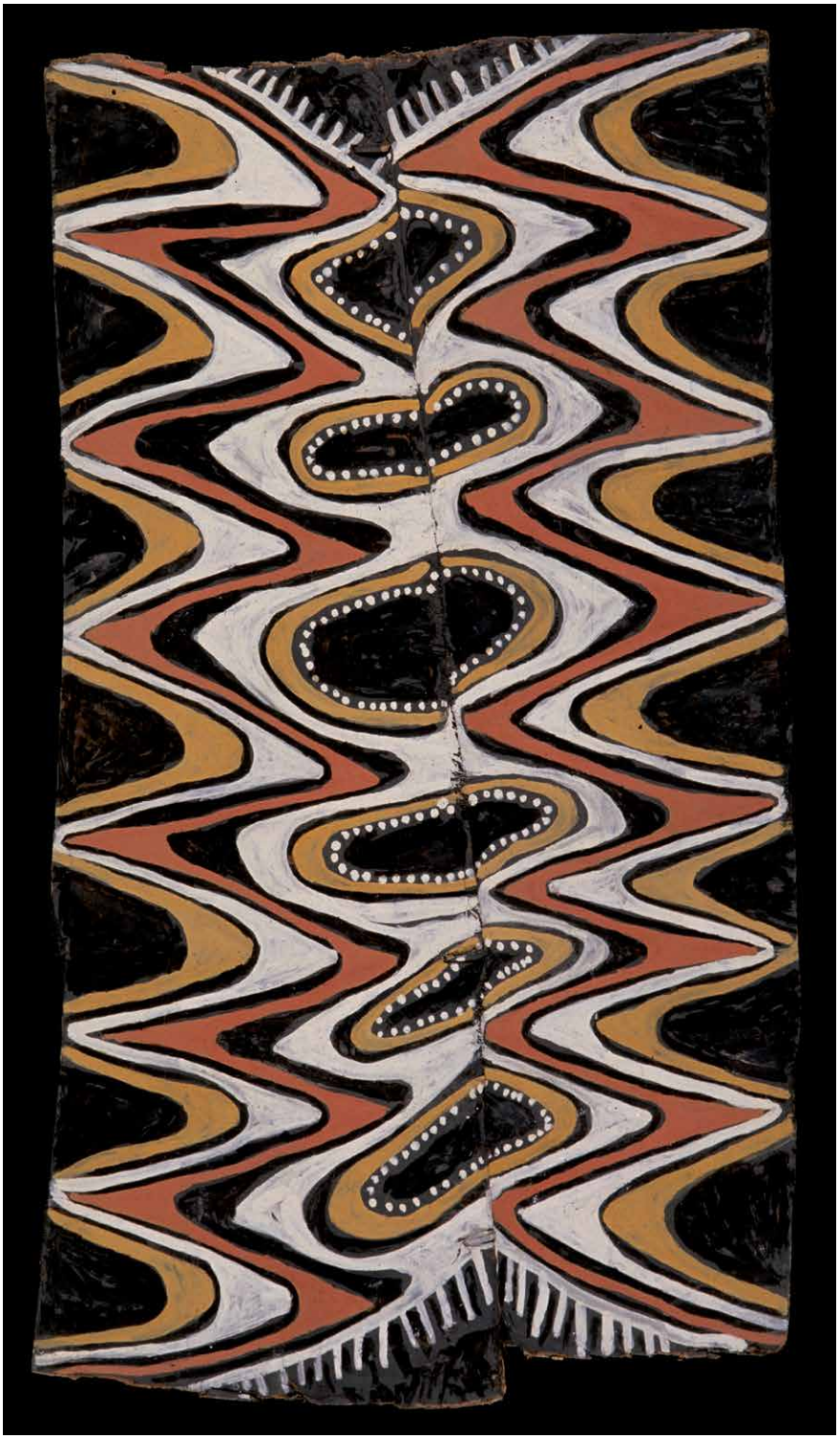

Figure 10.25. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. *Apoleyar* bird, Tek totem, 125.2 × 71.8 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.407.

Figure 10.25

This strikingly 'abstract' painting is a representation of a type of small bird named *apoleyar*, one of the artist's clan totems. Only the bird's torso and wings are shown. Its torso (*nedii*; TP *namel*) is represented six times by the black ovoid forms arranged in a column in the centre of the design. Its wings are similarly represented several times by the different pairs of multi-coloured triangular forms that flank these ovoid forms on each side of the design.

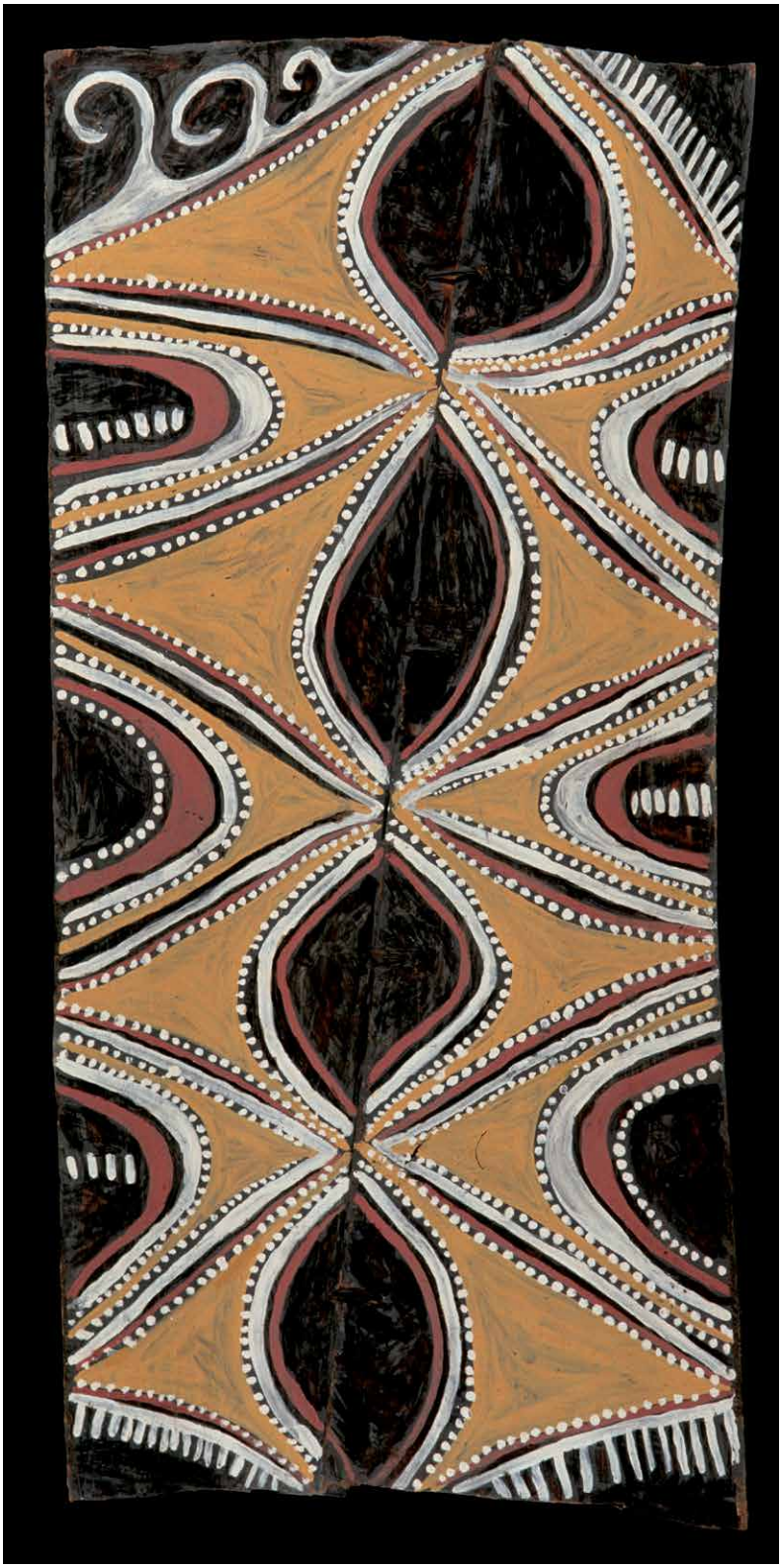

Figure 10.26. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Leaf-eating caterpillar (*yopomeshe hoposhopo*), Tek totem, 131.1 × 66.9 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.408.

Figure 10.26

The brightly coloured caterpillar (*hoposhopo*) of the type named *yopomeshe* depicted in this painting is one of the largest found in the Washkuk Hills. The larvae grow up to 10 centimetres or more in length and two centimetres in diameter. Of all the multi-legged crawling animals in this region this grub is second in size only to the black millipede, with which it is often paired symbolically in ritual songs. The *yopomeshe* caterpillar is possibly the larval form of the one of the giant Birdwing butterflies that abound in this region. According to the artist, the grub typically feeds on the leaves of banana plants and betel nut palms – the term for banana (*yopo*) forming part of its name. In the painting, the four black pointed ovals represent different segments of the caterpillar's long body. The yellow triangles outlined in white and red on the two sides depict its many short legs (*yatii*). The other motifs are non-representational. People refrain from touching this caterpillar since contact with it causes the skin to become intensely irritated.

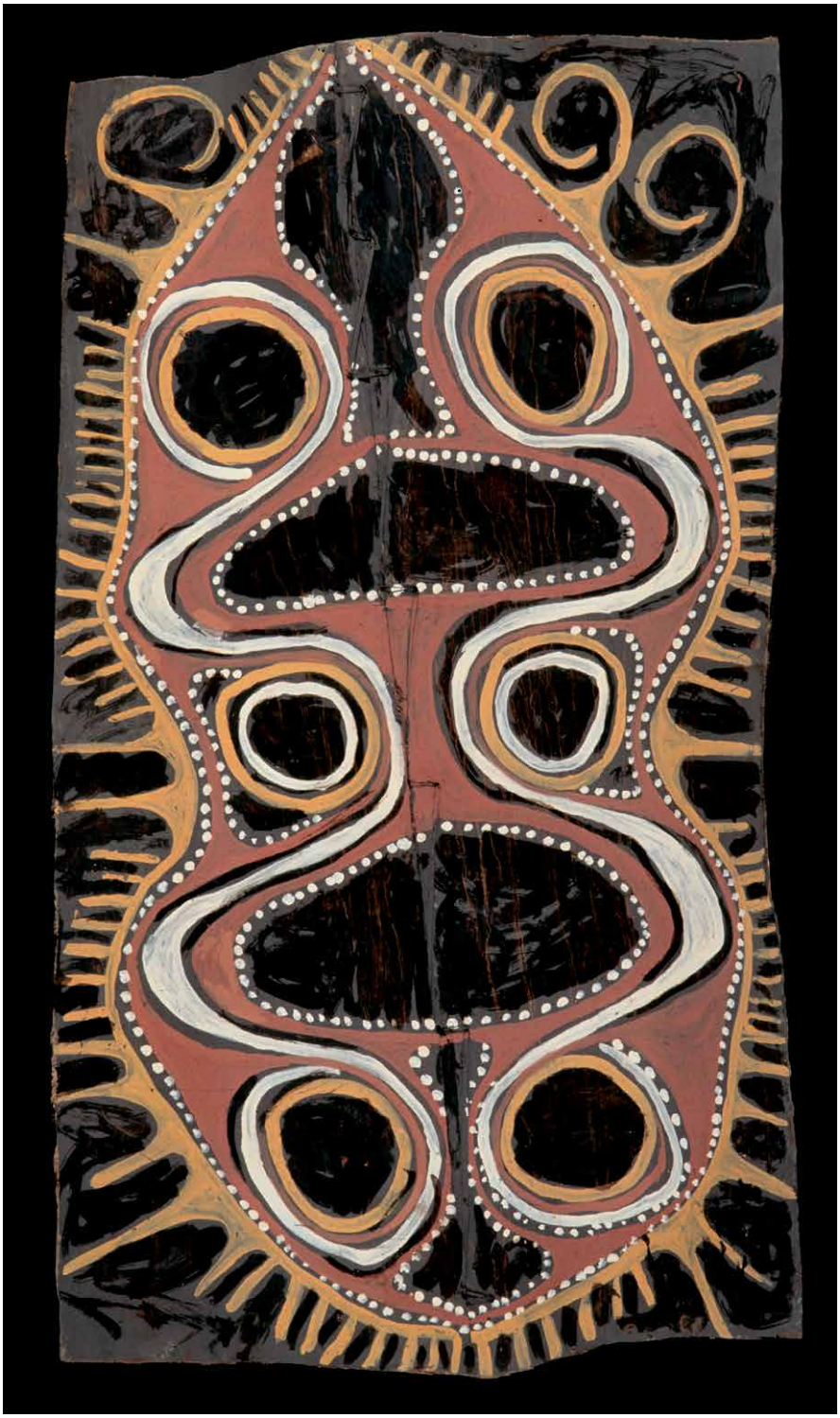

Figure 10.27. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Fruit of the *mima bodi* tree, Tek totem, 121.6 × 69.3 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.409.

Figure 10.27

This painting depicts the bright red mature fruit of the 'female' (*mima*) variety of *bodi* tree (see also Figure 10.7), one of the artist's clan totems. The bright red fruit are represented by the three pairs of black roundels positioned at the top, middle, and bottom of the design respectively. The two much larger black ovoid forms represent the tree's trunk, and the two serpentine white lines that wind around the fruit and trunk depict the branches from which the fruit hang. The yellow scroll or sawtooth motif that runs around the outer edge of the design is non-representational.

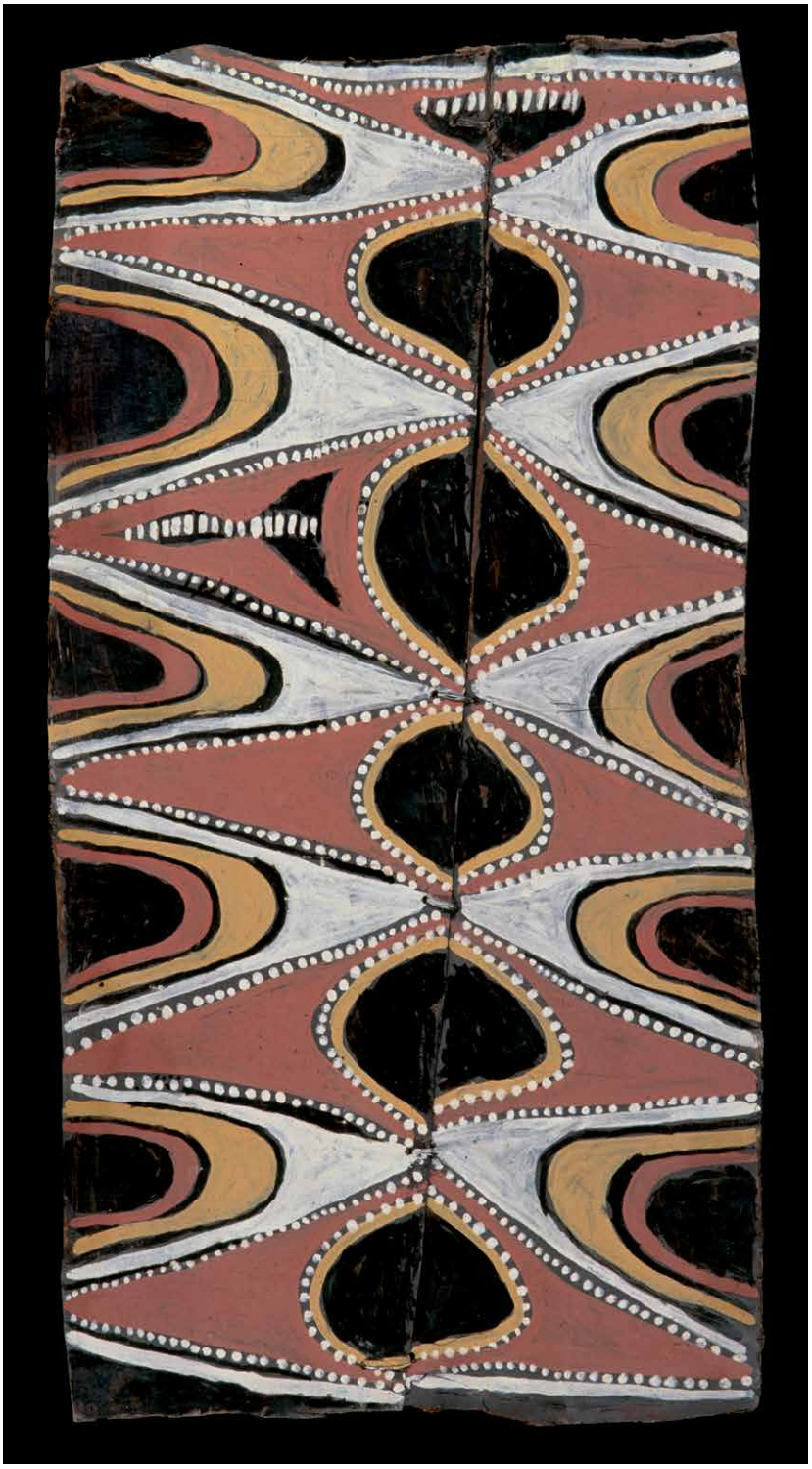

Figure 10.28. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Waves (*ukuboro*), not totemic; 133.1 × 71.4 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.412.

Figure 10.28

This strikingly geometrical design is a representation of the metre-high choppy waves that can suddenly form on long straight stretches of the Sepik River, and on large lagoons, when strong winds start blowing. The artist identified the white V-shaped forms arranged in columns on the sides of the bark as the waves with their foamy crests. The column of black ovoid forms positioned on the design's central long axis depict 'the underwater forces' that generate the waves. The dotted white lines represent the long ribbons of yellowy foam that blow off the tops of the breaking waves and spread across the surface of the water.

Up until the late 1940s the Kwoma, like other 'hill' peoples in the Ambunti region, made little if any use of canoes. Nor could they swim. Fishing was done mainly during the dry season when men and women waded in shallow streams and lagoons with spears and hand nets – the male and female fishing instruments respectively (Whiting 1941:47). During the wet season, when the rising waters of the Sepik River inundated lagoons, and heavy rains transformed the many small streams that flow out of the Washkuk Hills into torrents, fishing with spears and hand nets became more difficult. During this period Kwoma obtained fish and other aquatic products primarily through trade with neighbouring peoples on the Sepik. After the Second World War, and the suppression by the Australian administration of intertribal warfare in the Ambunti region, Kwoma learnt how to make canoes from their river-dwelling neighbours. Today they regularly use their canoes for fishing on lagoons and also for transporting people and goods to Ambunti (see Figure 11.12). Compared to river peoples, however, Kwoma are still inexperienced canoeists and are generally fearful of venturing out on to large open expanses of water during periods of high winds, lest the waves swamp their canoes and they drown. A painting depicting rough water, such as the one illustrated, powerfully evokes the dangers inexperienced canoeists face when strong winds suddenly start blowing.

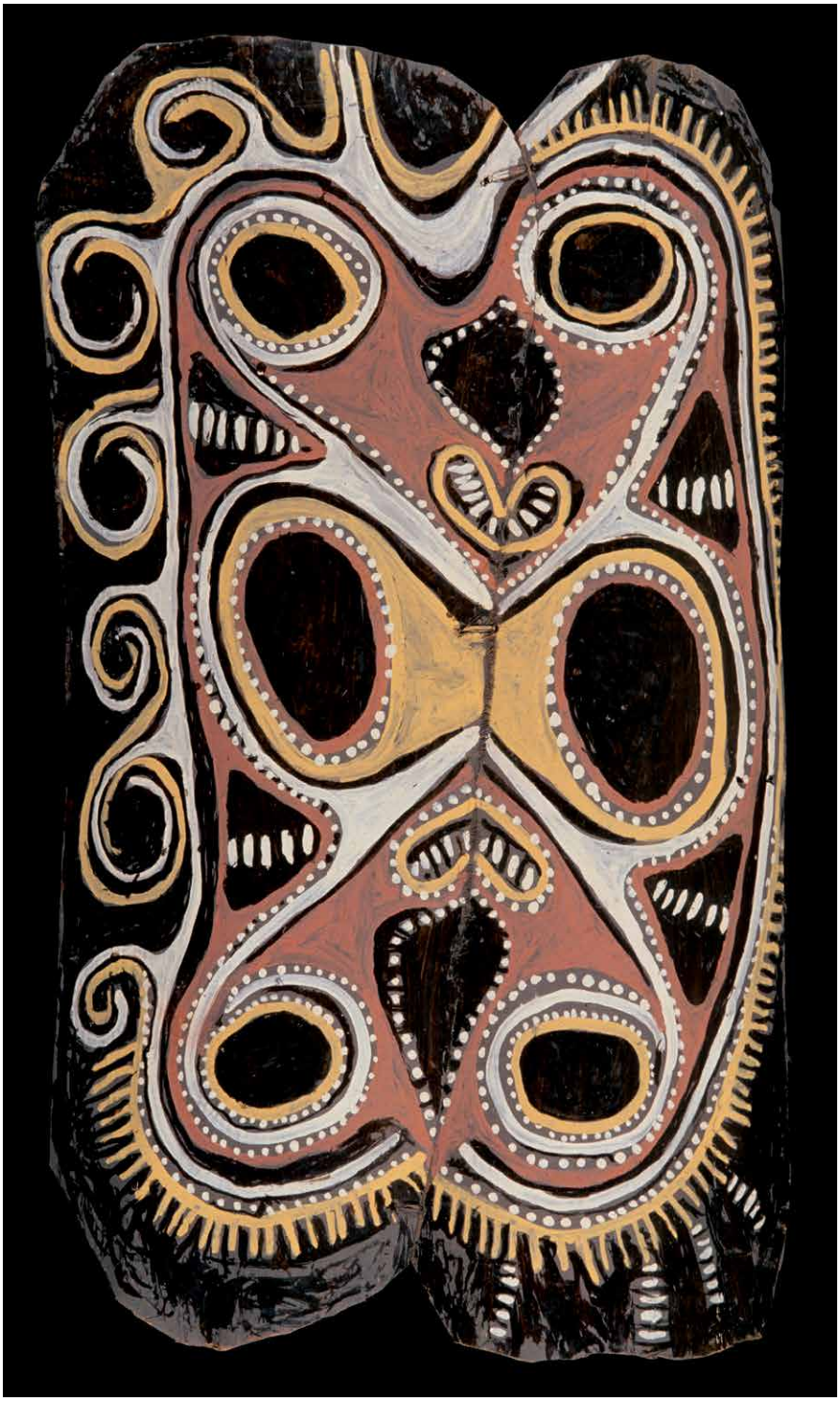

Figure 10.29. Manal Kapay, Mbanggwatapa clan, Bangwis. Sago-stealing spirit (*nokuyagaba*), not totemic, 115.4 × 66.9 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.414.

Figure 10.29

The entity depicted in Figure 10.29 is a type of impish forest spirit named *nokuyagaba*, a term which literally means 'sago-taking ghost' (*noku*, sago; *ya*, take; *gaba*, ghost). These small winged spirits are believed to live in hollows in trees high up in the forest canopy and in deep fissures in large boulders in uninhabited parts of the forest. In this bark, the spirit is depicted by means of an anthropomorphic 'face'. This is shown twice: once in the upper half of the design and once, in mirror reflection, in the lower. Each of the two faces displays a pair of large black eyes, a bulbous black nose, and an open mouth displaying a row of teeth. The large black roundels between the two faces in the centre of the design represent deeply fissured boulders, one of the places in which these spirits hide during the day. The other motifs are non-representational.

The favourite food of *nokuyagaba* spirits is freshly boiled sago and at night these beings are thought to enter houses in search of this delicacy when the occupants are asleep or away. A sign that one of these spirits has been in a house is that packets of freshly cooked boiled sago set aside for a meal have inexplicably gone missing, or have been torn open and their contents gnawed. (In reality such damage is caused by the many rodents that live in and around houses.) According to the artist, this painting depicts a *nokuyagaba* spirit he saw one night attempting to remove packets of boiled sago from his house. He said that he was woken by a scratching sound. When he sat up and shone his torch in the direction of the noise, he discovered one of these diminutive spirits attempting to escape with several serves of freshly cooked sago in its arms. The artist threw his large bush knife at it, but being small and agile the spirit had no difficulty escaping through a window.

Figure 10.30. The painter Ambunyiki decorated for a performance of the Yena ceremony held at Bangwis village in December 1973.

Ambunyiki

Biographical note

Ambunyiki of Nowil clan, Bangwis village, was born in the 1930s. Unlike the other artists whose work is illustrated in this book Ambunyiki had spent a significant part of his life away from his village serving in the Papua New Guinea army. After leaving the army be returned to his home community and for two decades served as its elected Local Government Councillor, the closest equivalent in this part of New Guinea to a 'chief'. This position entitled him to represent his community at meetings of the Ambunti Local Government Council (see Bowden 2023a: Figures 11.6-11.8) and chair the informal meetings held in his village every few weeks when matters of community concern were publicly discussed. During his time as Councillor these meetings were held in Wayipanal men's house. Like other men of political influence, Ambunyiki was polygynous and maintained an exceptionally large household. His family's several dwellings were set slightly apart from the rest of the village, as is often the case with leading men, in a large clearing in the forest on the eastern side of Bangwis hill.

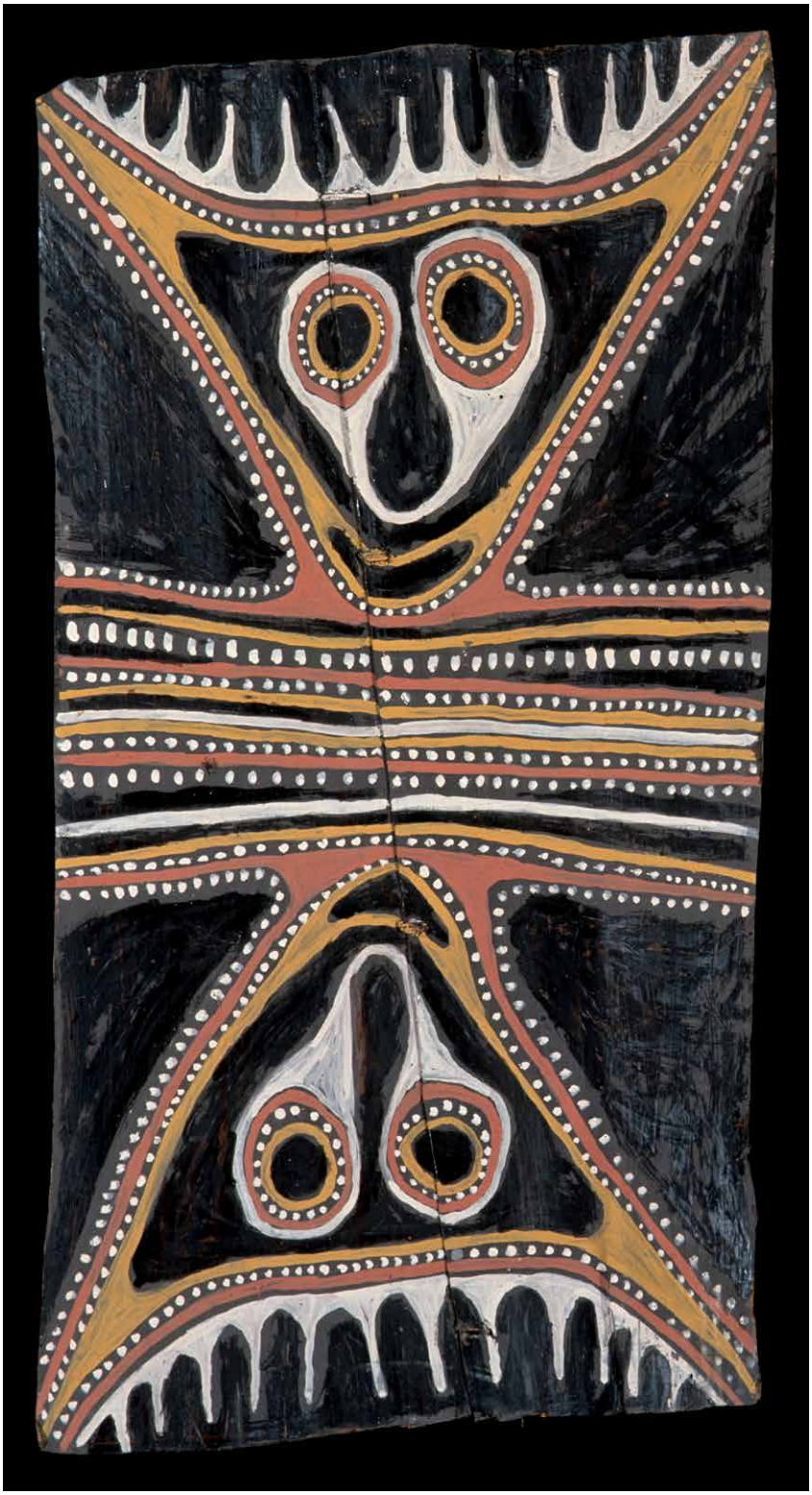

Figure 10.31. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Flying fox (*apokwashi*), Wurambanj totem, 134 × 70 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.395.

Figure 10.31

The painting in Figure 10.31 represents a type of fruit bat named *apokwashi*, the second largest of the several varieties of flying fox found in the Washkuk Hills. The animal is shown twice, once in the upper half of the design and once, in mirror reflection, in the lower. In each half the fruit bat is depicted by means of two anatomical features: its 'face' and its outstretched wings. The face is heart-shaped and set on a black ground framed by concentric white, yellow and red lines. Each face has a pair of black eyes, a black bulbous nose and a small curved mouth. According to the artist, the multicoloured triangular form framing each face represents the animal's wings. The band of parallel white, red and yellow lines in the centre of the design is non-representational.

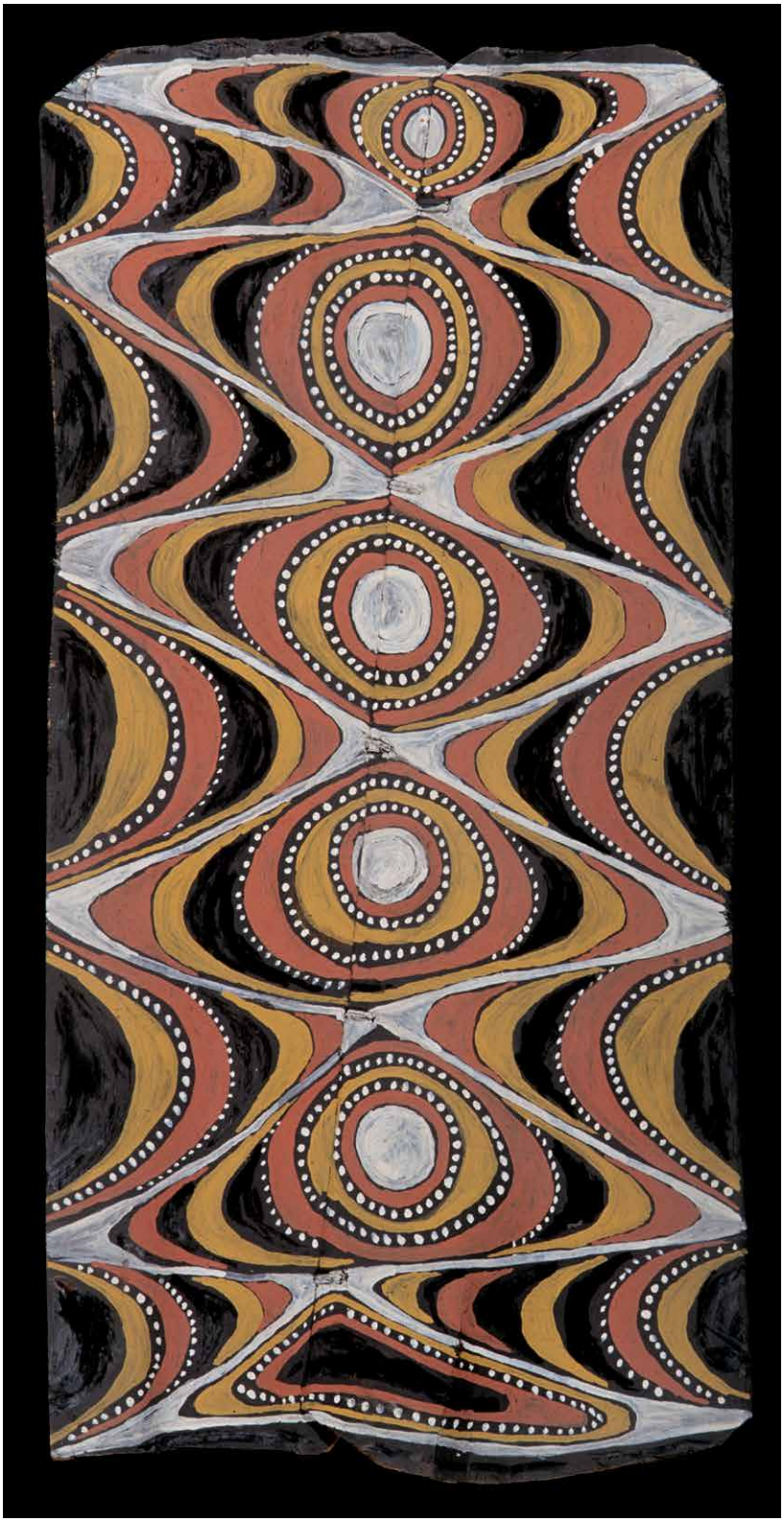

Figure 10.32. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Waves (*uku ver ver*), not totemic, 137 × 66.9 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.396.

Figure 10.32

This painting, like the one by Manal Kapay discussed earlier (Figure 10.28), depicts the metre-high choppy waves that can suddenly form on large lagoons and on long stretches of the Sepik River when strong winds start blowing. Both Kapay and Ambunyiki expressed the view that waves are not generated directly by the wind but by powerful underwater 'vibrations' similar to the subterranean forces that cause earth tremors – a common occurrence in this part of New Guinea.

In the painting the choppy waves are represented by the zigzag red, black and yellow lines. The zigzag white lines depict the long ribbons of yellowy foam that are blown off the crests of breaking waves and scatter across the surface of the water. The white roundels arranged in a column in the centre of the design represent the powerful underwater forces that generate these waves.

Figure 10.33. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Edible insect larva termed *me poko ow*, Tek totem, 137.5 × 73.5 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.397.

Figure 10.33

The painting in Figure 10.33 is one of two illustrated (see also Figure 10.10) which depicts a type of large edible larva found in the thick woody stems of rotting *me poko* vines, hence its name: '*me poko* [vine] larva' (*me*, wood; *poko*, vine; *ow*, larva). The vine grows to the thickness of a man's arm or larger and the larva feeds off its soft woody interior. The lava is one of the artist's clan totems. The animal is shown, highly schematically, at two different stages in its life cycle: as a larva and in its mature form (probably a moth or a beetle). The grub is represented by means of a large triangular 'face' (*misoma*). This is shown twice, once in the upper half of the bark and once, in mirror reflection, in the lower. Each face possesses a pair of black 'eyes', a black bulbous 'nose', and a black 'mouth'. The mouth, represented by the black ovoid form in the centre of the design, is shared by both faces; the two images, therefore, are partially merged. The mature animal is represented by its antennae (*boriina boriina*); these are the two pairs of white hook forms in the centre on each side of the design. The white scroll motifs at the top and bottom of the painting are non-representational.

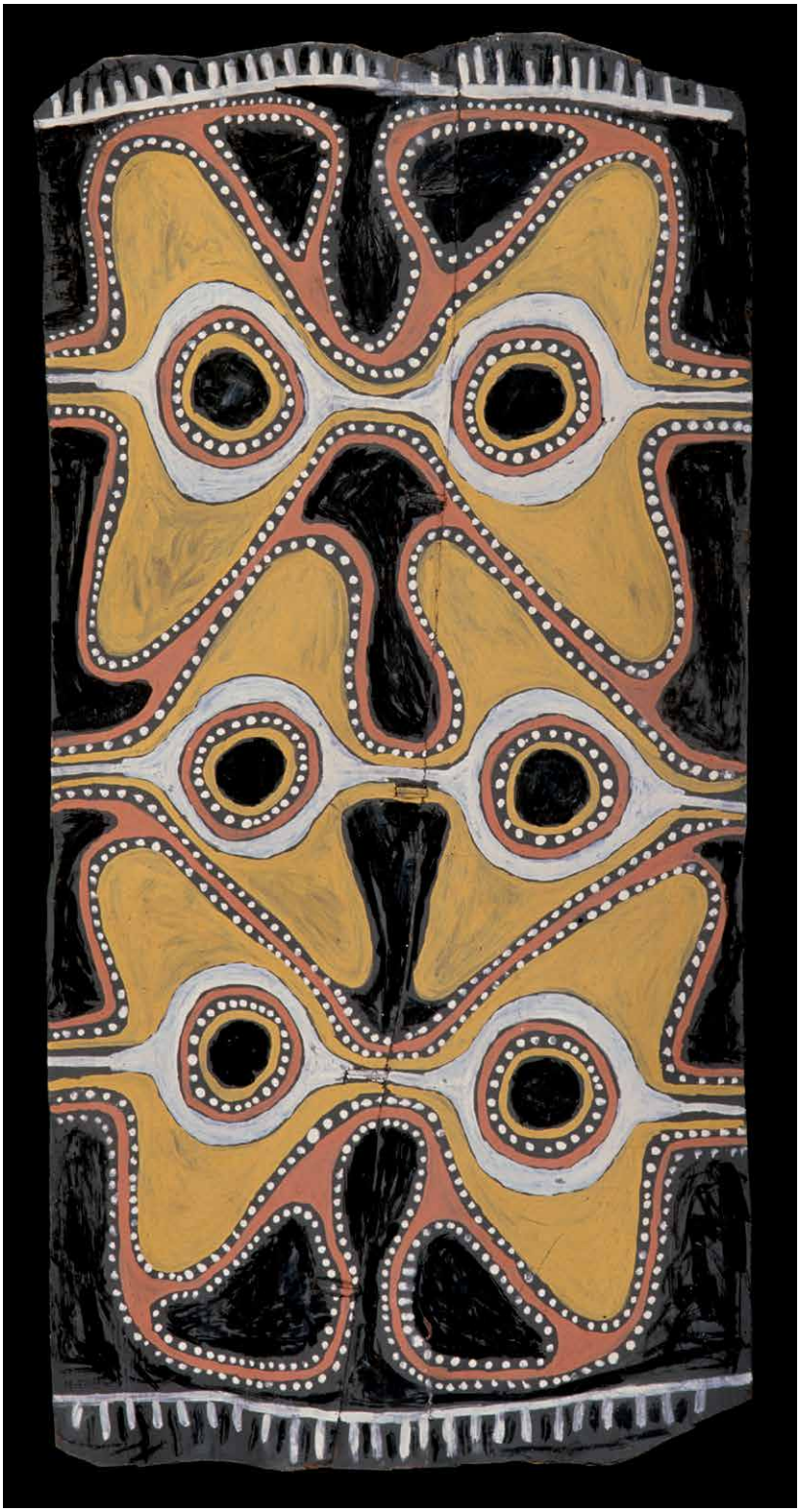

Figure 10.34. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Butterfly (*aposiibiiruka*), Tek totem, 133.4 × 66.2 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.398.

Figure 10.34

This painting depicts a butterfly, one of the artist's clan totems. The artist did not name the variety depicted. The insect is shown sitting on a leaf with its wings outstretched. It is shown three times: at the top, in the centre and at the bottom of the design. The three pairs of yellow triangular forms represent the insect's wings, and the three pairs of black roundels outlined in red and white depict its 'eyes'. In this painting the triangular forms representing the insect's wings in the centre of the design have been laterally reversed (or rotated 180 degrees). The artist said he did this to make these forms fit better into the overall design.

As noted earlier (see the commentaries on Figures 10.11 and 10.12), the 'butterfly hinge' or mask-like motif used to represent the insect in this painting is a variant of one which Kwoma say is not indigenous to their society but has been borrowed since European contact from neighbouring Iatmul-speaking peoples on the Sepik River. Iatmul artefacts decorated with variants of this motif include overmodelled human skulls, gourd lime containers, shields, skull racks and suspension hooks (Kelm 1966-68, vol. 1, Colour Plate 4 facing p.24, and Plates 19, 237, 242, 262-65, 274, 279, 380, 438; Nicolas 2000: Plates 276-77, 284, 287, 289).

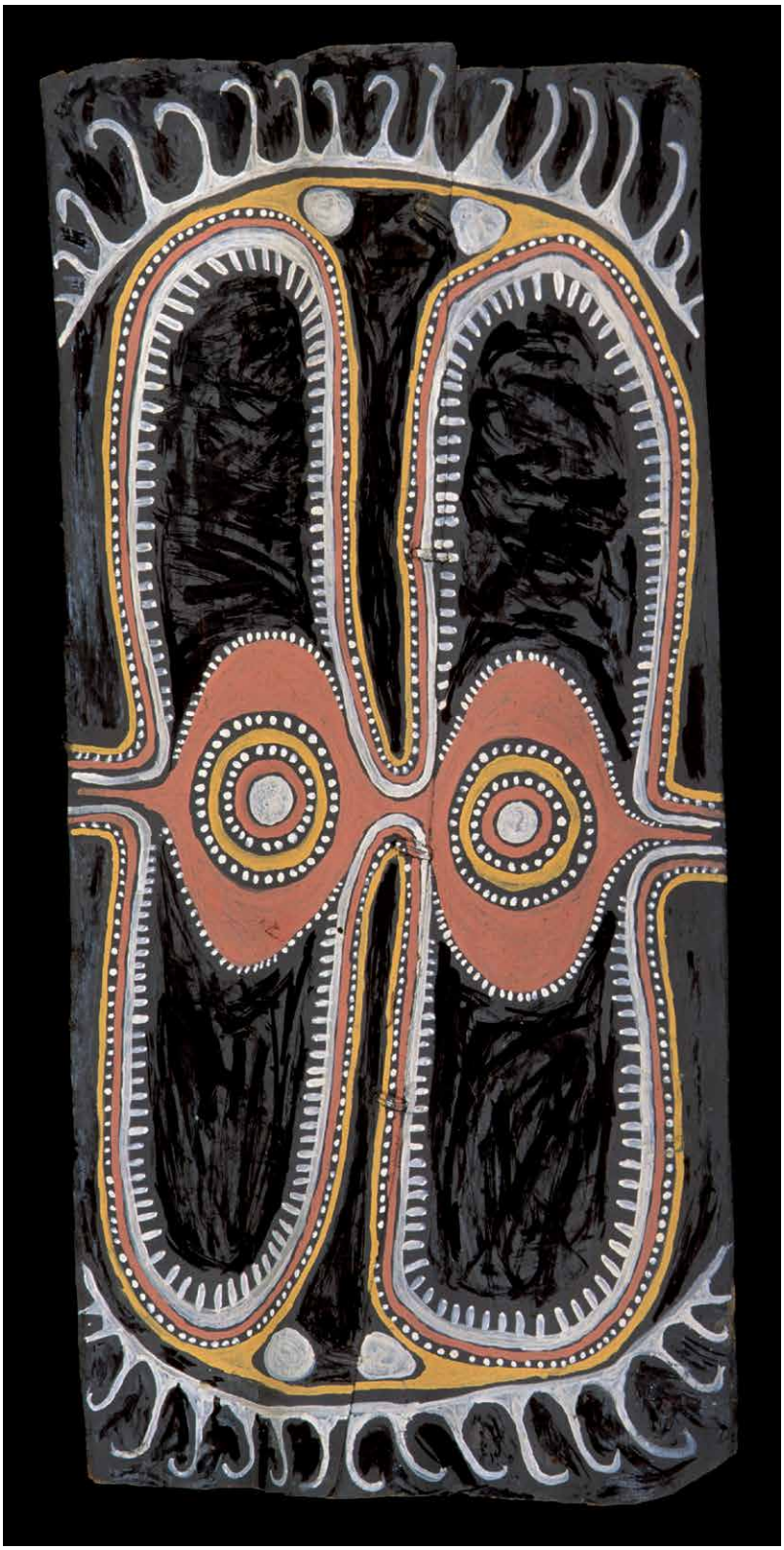

Figure 10.35. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Butterfly cocoon (*aposiibiiruka bey*), Tek totem, 135.2 × 63.7 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.399.

Figure 10.35

This painting depicts a butterfly cocoon, an entity which Kwoma identify as an 'egg' (*bey*). The cocoon is represented twice by the large black ovoid forms outlined in white, red and yellow on the two sides of the bark. The artist identified the roundels composed of concentric white, yellow and red circles inside these ovoid forms as the maturing insect's multi-coloured wings. This, he indicated, is how they are seen inside the cocoon when its shell becomes translucent immediately before it splits and the adult insect emerges (D'Abrera 1971:14). The scroll border motif is non-representational.

The mask-like or 'butterfly hinge' motif in this painting is a variant of the one the same artist used in the preceding painting (Figure 10.34) to depict the butterfly itself.

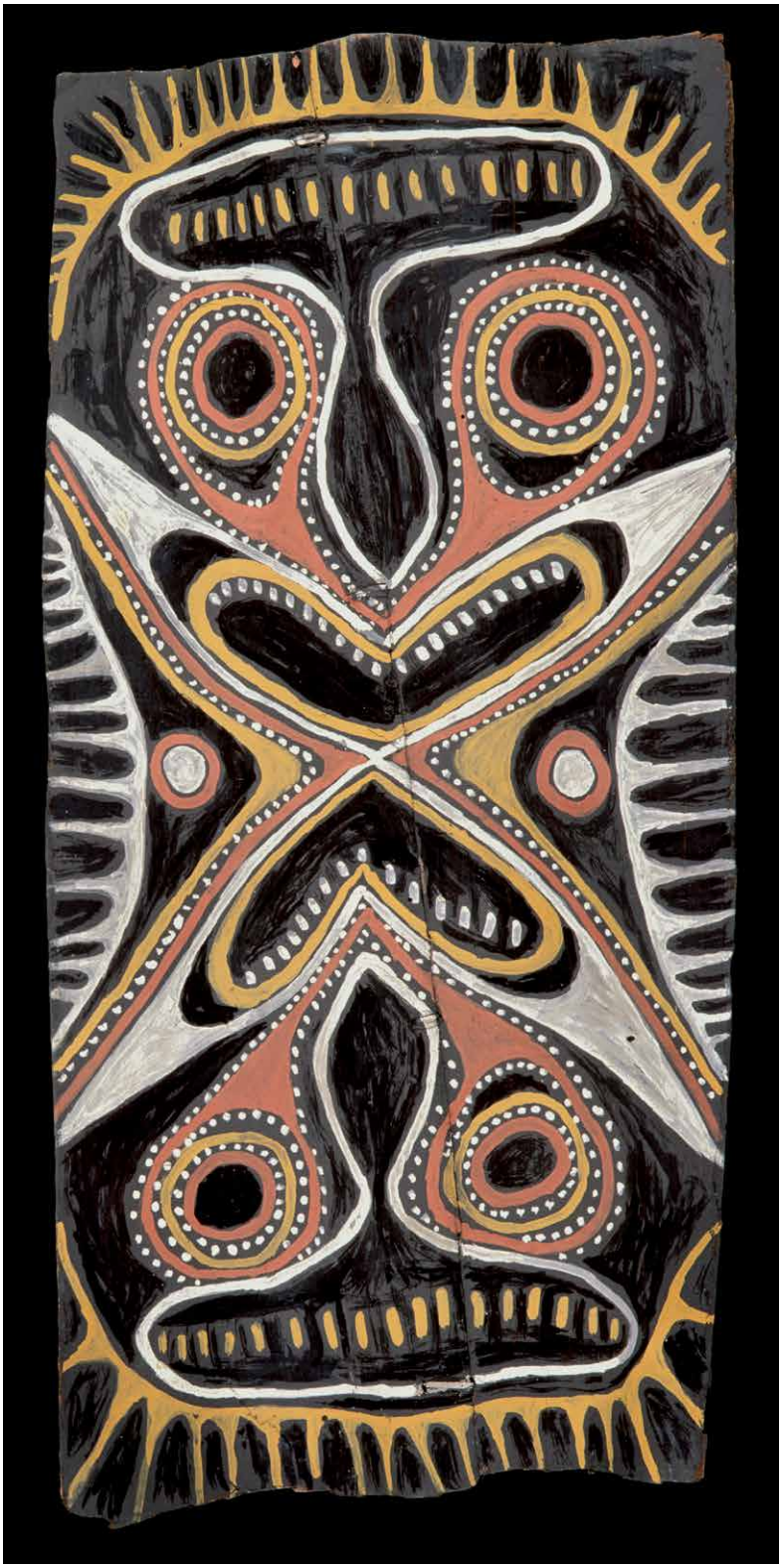

Figure 10.36.
Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. *Arokomaka* double-face design, not totemic, 136.4 × 64.5 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.400.

Figure 10.36

This bark is one of several illustrated (e.g. Figure 10.6) which depict the type of paired anthropomorphic faces (*misoma*) that are carved in large numbers as decorative motifs on beams in men's houses. Like the carved image on which it is based the two faces in this case mirror each other across a horizontal reflection line (i.e. one that runs parallel to the short sides of the design). One of the two faces occupies the upper half of the bark and the other the lower. Each face possesses a pair of circular black 'eyes', an upturned or heart-shaped 'mouth', a row of white 'teeth' (the short white lines), and a large bulbous black 'nose', the upper section of which extends above the eyes where it represents what the artist identified as a 'forehead' (*makabe*).

Figure 10.37. Ambunyiki, Nowil clan, Bangwis. Centipede (*medii*), Tek totem, 137.7 × 69.6 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.402.

Figure 10.37

The centipede (*medii*) depicted in this bark is one of the artist's clan totems. Ambunyiki identified the large black ovoid form with concave sides in the centre of the design as the animal's long narrow body. The areas of solid red on each side of this ovoid form represent the animal's reddish colour. The black roundels flanking the body, and outlined by concentric yellow, white and red lines, correspond to its two 'eyes'. The multicoloured chevrons bordering the solid areas of red depict the animal's numerous short legs. The white hook forms at the two ends of the animal's body are different depictions of the centipede's 'mouth', and the red hook forms they enclose depict its 'teeth' (i.e. the barbs in its tail). When asked what the scroll border motif depicted the artist replied that the white hook forms were additional representations of the animal's many short legs.

The artist stated that there are three types of centipedes in the Washkuk Hills: two larger ones, named *yomusakiira medii* and *nokuchokwopa medii* respectively, and a smaller one named *uku medii* (literally 'water centipede'). The first, he said, was much more aggressive and had a much more powerful sting than the other two. The smaller of the three types is often found clinging to pieces of driftwood or other debris in streams and on lagoons, hence its name. The *yomusakiira* variety, he stated, has an overall 'red' colour. The *nokuchokwopa* variety is 'yellow'. When he first showed me this painting the artist said that it depicted 'centipedes in general' and not any particular kind. But after briefly contemplating the design he changed his mind and said that because the dominant colour was red the painting was better thought of as a depiction of the 'red', or *yomusakiira*, variety.

Figure 10.38. Meyimbor of Hipo clan, Bangwis village, holding a pre-contact, but newly repainted, ceramic sculpture of a type displayed during the Yena ceremony, one of three rites associated with the harvesting of yams.

Meyimbor

Biographical note

Meyimbor of Hipo clan (now deceased) was born around 1935. Unlike the majority of outstanding artists, who take an active role in village politics, Meyimbor was an exceptionally self-effacing man and rarely spoke at village meetings. The clan to which he belonged was the last to move to the newly established village of Bangwis after the formerly united Honggwama tribal settlement broke up and its different clans established three new villages: Bangwis, Washkuk and Melawei. This process began around 1940 when Nowil, one of the tribe's two largest clans, founded Bangwis. Prior to then all of the Honggwama tribe's eighteen clans were located at a single settlement located on the back of a high ridge in the northern half of the Washkuk Hills (see Whiting and Reed 1938-39, Plate facing page 168; Whiting 1941). This was the site at which the two American anthropologists Whiting and Reed conducted fieldwork among the Honggwama in the second half of the 1930s (Whiting and Reed 1938-39; Whiting 1941). When Meyimbor's clan abandoned this former settlement its members moved as a group initially to Washkuk, the village to which the tribe's other clans belonging to same totemic division, Hamikwa, had settled. But they owned little land in the immediate vicinity of this village and around 1960, at the invitation of the clans already located at Bangwis, moved to their present site on the northern side of Bangwis hill. For two decades following this move Meyimbor's clan, like all of the others in the village, shared Wayipanal men's house as a social centre for its male members and as a venue for the rituals it sponsored. But in the late 1970s his clan and the two other groups on the same side of the village constructed and decorated a new ceremonial house which became their main social centre and the venue for the rituals they initiated. This was the building named Nggeyasatuk (Figures 1.1 and 1.4). Meyimbor was a major contributor of bark paintings and sculptures to this building; like Wayipanal, this men's house was a masterpiece of vernacular architecture.

Figure 10.39. Meyimbor, Hipo clan, Bangwis. Taro plant (*boga*), Hamikwa totem, 104 × 70.9 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.404.

Figure 10.39

This painting depicts one of several local varieties of taro plant. The type, named *may boga* (*boga*, taro), has an edible corm. Each quadrant of the bark displays one of the plant's large heart-shaped leaves. The four leaves are connected in the centre of the design to the plant's edible corm, represented by the black roundel outlined in yellow, white and red. The other motifs are non-representational.

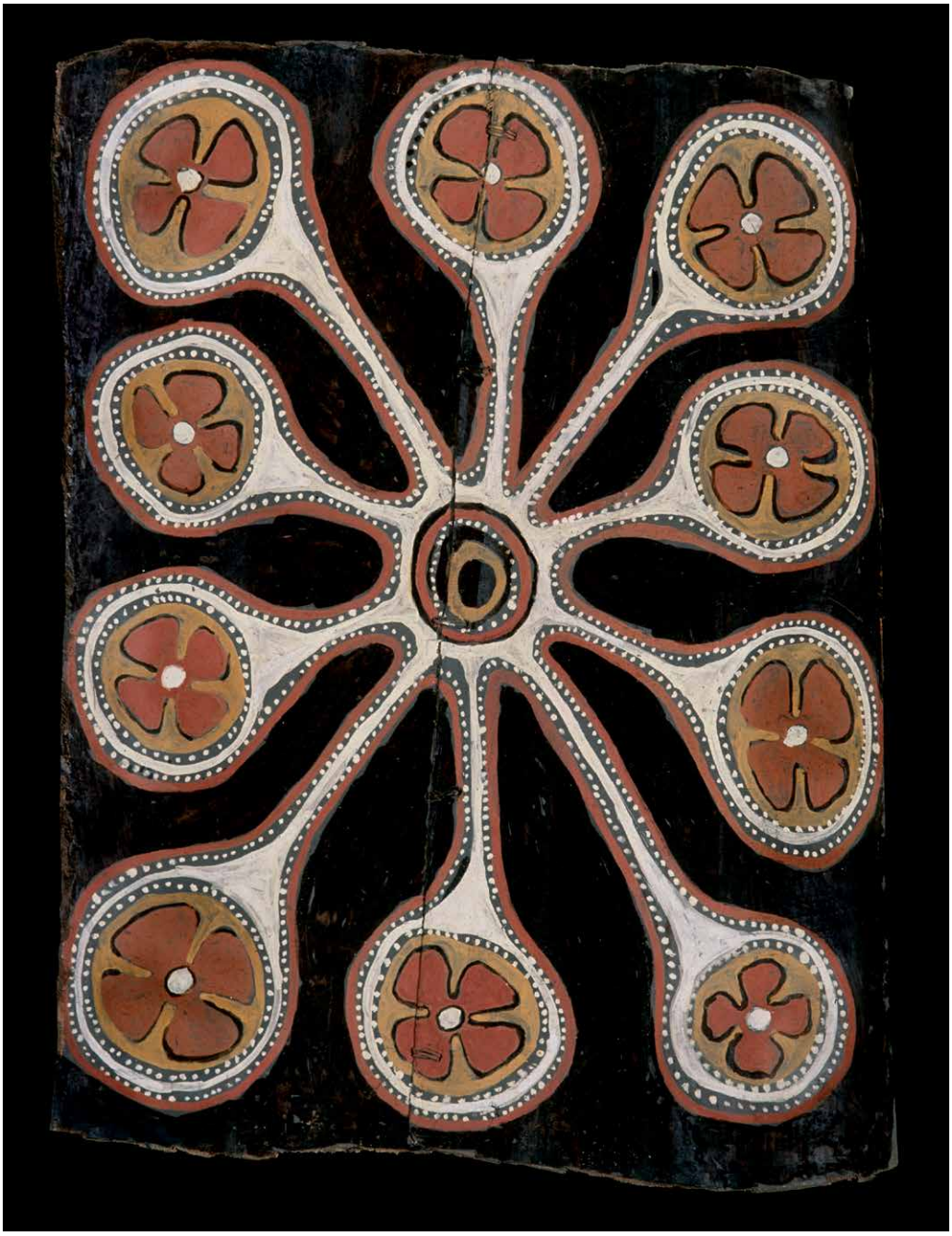

Figure 10.40. Meyimbor, Hipo clan, Bangwis. Waterlily plant (*ukuba*), Hamikwa totem, 107.9 × 81.5 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 200.405.

Figure 10.40

The painting in Figure 10.40 depicts the flowers, flower stalks and underwater stem of a type of waterlily plant that is one of the artist's clan totems. Waterlilies grow in abundance on the lagoons that surround the Washkuk Hills. They have an edible seed which provides Kwoma, and neighbouring river peoples, with a valued seasonal food. The different varieties of waterlilies are totems of different clans and are among the more common entities depicted in bark paintings (cf. Figure 10.8). In this design the ten rosettes distributed around the edge of the bark depict the plant's showy flowers. The attached solid white lines represent their stalks and the circular form in the centre the plant's long underwater stem.

Figure 10.41. The painter Mburunggay of Melawei village decorated for a performance of the Minja ceremony held at Bangwis village in December 1973.

Mburunggay

Biographical note

Mburunggay of Amachey clan, Melawei village, was born in the 1920s. Like other leading artists he was very well informed about his clan's history, its myths and ritual procedures. In the 1960s and early 1970s he acted as a field assistant for the late Douglas Newton, then head of the Department of the Art of Africa, Oceania and the Americas at The Metropolitan Museum, New York. He produced a number of paintings on bark and on paper for Newton which are now in that museum's collection. One of his works on paper is reproduced in Figure 141 (p. 94) in Newton's *Crocodile and cassowary* (1971). Newton spells his name 'Burrunggei'. Mburunggay was an adventurous painter and enjoyed experimenting with new media.

Figure 10.42. Mburunggay, Amachey clan, Melawei. 'Spirit' crocodile named Mowonjiya owned by the Keyava totemic division, 154.4 × 44 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.430.

Figure 10.42

This bark depicts a tutelary spirit named Mowonjiya. The spirit is owned by the totemic division to which the artist's clan belongs. One of the forms this spirit assumes is that of a giant crocodile which has its primary home beneath a lagoon at the northern end of the Washkuk Hills. In this painting the design takes the form of a rebus: an image where the terms for its different parts compose that of the subject depicted. The entities depicted consist of a crocodile (*mo*), which has been given an anthropomorphic face, and an edible fern named *wojiya*; the latter is represented by the rows of arcs on the two sides of the bark (see also Figure 2.6). Taken together the terms for these two objects (*mo* + *wojiya*) compose the spirit's name: Mowonjiya (= *Mowojiya*), literally 'Crocodile Fern'. This is one of several paintings by the same artist illustrated in this book (see also Figures 6.1, 10.43 and 10.44) that make use of both indigenous and commercial pigments. In these barks the black and the white colours derive from indigenous water-based paints but the bright blue and the red are oil-based enamels. Surprisingly, oil-based enamels adhere well to the traditional black clay ground. The artist proudly described these paintings as 'mixed media works' (TP *mikis*).

Like all spirits 'owned' by different totemic groups Mowonjiya acts in a generally protective way towards members of the clans with which it is affiliated. For instance, when warfare was still a feature of this society it might suddenly appear in the form of a fully armed warrior in the middle of a fray and deflect the enemy's spears away from men who belonged to the clans that owned it. Like all spirits, however, it is also believed to punish ruthlessly those who behave in seriously antisocial ways, typically by causing them to have a serious accident (Bowden 1983a). As well as being depicted in designs on bark Mowonjiya is frequently represented in the form of a crocodile in paintings on posts both in ceremonial houses and domestic dwellings owned by male members of the clans to which this spirit belongs.

Figure 10.43. Mburunggay, Amachey clan, Melawei. Flying fox (*siivagakibi*), Tek totem, 127.5 × 69.1 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.431.

Figure 10.43

The subject of this painting is a type of small flying fox named *siivagakibi*. This is not one of the artist's clan totems but is owned by several clans at Bangwis. The artist emphasised that members of these clans had given him permission to depict it. This type of flying fox is said to be especially fond of the apical bud or cabbage (TP *kru*) of the coconut palm (Jones 1984:48-9). The term for the coconut palm, *siiva*, forms part of its name. The artist identified the six black ovoid forms arranged in a column in the centre of the design as different representations of the animal's torso. The adjacent red triangular forms depict its outstretched wings. The other motifs are non-representational. The blue and red paints are commercial oil-based enamels.

Figure 10.44. Mburunggay, Amachey clan, Melawei. A group of underworld spirits in human form collectively named Takwarumb owned by the Keyava totemic division, 106.6 × 64.5 cm, 1988. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.432.

Figure 10.44

This highly stylised painting depicts the 'face', or appearance, of a group of cannibal spirits who live in the underworld beneath a spring in densely forested country to the north of the Washkuk Hills owned by Kaunga-speaking peoples (see Map; see also Bowden 2023a). Both the spirits and the spring have the same name: Takwarumb. In the painting the face depicting the spirits is shown twice: once in the upper half of the design and once, in reflection, in the lower. Each face has a pair of black eyes, a nose and a mouth, all outlined in white. The dotted lines and scroll border motif are non-representational. The blue and the red paints are commercial enamels.

Mburunggay stated that this painting alludes to an event that actually took place in the relatively recent past (see also Bowden 2023a:186-90). One day a powerful wind uprooted a giant forest tree. Water quickly filled the deep hole left in the ground by the upturned roots and fish appeared. A few days later a man from a nearby Kaunga-speaking village named Walawili came across the waterhole while foraging in the forest and noticed that it was full of fish. When he reached home that afternoon he asked his wife to go to the waterhole

the next day and catch some of the fish. At first light the following morning the woman set off for the pool with one of her female friends. After reaching the pool they climbed in and began scooping up fish in their large hand nets. Suddenly the water level rapidly rose. The woman's friend managed to climb out of the pool before the water overwhelmed her. But before the wife could do the same something grabbed hold of her legs and dragged her underwater. The woman's friend waited anxiously for a few minutes to see if she reappeared. When she did not the friend rushed home to tell the people there what had happened. The men of the village urgently talked the matter over among themselves and concluded that the woman had probably been captured by cannibal spirits living in the underworld beneath the waterhole, and that she might still be alive. They quickly assembled a large quantity of betel nuts, dried tobacco and smoked pork, wrapped this in a palm spathe and set off with the bundle for the waterhole. When they arrived they found that the water was now pouring over the banks of the pool and had created a new forest stream, to which they gave the name Wupa.

The men's first concern was to determine whether the woman had drowned and was lying at the bottom of the pool. A man put one end of a long bamboo pole he had brought with him into the water and felt around with it. Finding nothing they decided that the woman must have been taken down into the underworld. The woman's brother volunteered to go down to the underworld to see if he could recover her. He asked for the long bamboo pole to be submerged as far as it would go and be held firmly in position. He then waded into the pool and using the pole as a guide allowed himself to sink into its depths. Before long he reached the bottom of the pool and passed right through the water into the underworld. There he found himself in a village with a large ceremonial house in its centre. He walked over to the building. A large group of fearsome-looking cannibal spirits, ghosts of dead warriors, were sitting inside. Nervously, he greeted them and asked if they had seen his sister. They replied, mendaciously, that they had not but that he was welcome to search their village. Accompanied by a band of lively children, ghosts of dead youngsters, he walked slowly from one end of the village to the other, searching every house he passed. Finding no sign of his sister he went back to the men's house. The spirits invited him to take a seat on a large plank of wood lying on the earth floor in the centre of the building. The brother was convinced that the spirits had captured his sister and had magically created the pool in the upper world and filled it with fish as a way of capturing someone to eat. He informed them that he and his co-villagers had assembled a large quantity of their choicest foods and that if they were holding his sister and were prepared to release her they would give them this gift in exchange. The spirits briefly talked the matter over among themselves and then invited the man to look underneath the plank on which he was sitting. He shifted the plank aside and found his sister crouching naked, bound hand and foot, at the bottom of a narrow hole. He immediately pulled her out, untied her, and after thanking the men took her over to bottom of the pool that led to the upper world. They climbed up into the water and, guided by the long bamboo pole, soon reached the surface. The woman's husband and the other men greeted them ecstatically. The brother informed the other men that the cannibal spirits had released the woman on condition that they were given the parcel of food. So the men threw this into the water and, using the long bamboo pole, pushed it down to the spirits who were waiting below. The woman and the men then returned to their village.

The artist emphasised that this story is not a 'myth', in the sense that it describes events that took place at the beginning of history before the ancestors of the different Kwoma clans had emerged from the spirit world but is an account of an event that happened relatively recently in the lives of the Kaunga-speaking people then located at Walawili village. This included the artist's own clan forebears, who were originally Kaunga speakers. The artist also emphasised that the cannibal spirits depicted in this painting still live in the underworld beneath the forest spring into which they dragged the woman.

Another painting by Mburunggay with the same subject can be seen on the right of the group of six illustrated in Figure 2.10. That painting, done exclusively in indigenous pigments, was produced in 1982 six years before the one reproduced here. The two differ somewhat in form and illustrate some of the variations in the way the same subject can be depicted in a design on bark.

Figure 11.1. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village, working on a painting in acrylics on canvas, 1973. An unfinished bark painting can be seen in the background.

11

Kwoma Paintings on Paper

When I began fieldwork at Bangwis in October 1972 I realised immediately that the best of the bark paintings on display in Wayipanal, at that time the village's only men's house, were of outstanding quality artistically and I quickly decided to make a collection for myself. As indicated earlier in this book, there never has been a commercial market of any consequence for this art form and there were no barks for sale. To make a collection, therefore, I realised that I would have to commission paintings from different artists. But before asking anyone to produce some barks for me I decided to make a collection of paintings on paper. The intention was twofold. One was to compile a set of designs that would complement, and potentially expand, the range of those on display on the ceiling in Wayipanal. The other was to help determine who, in my view, were the best painters in the village from whom I could then commission barks.

Before commencing this project I asked several men who were highly regarded as artists if they would be prepared to do some paintings for me on paper. I told them that I would provide all of the necessary materials and that they would be free to paint whatever they wished. But I added that my primary aim was to make a collection of designs of the kind found in bark paintings. So as not to discourage anyone from participating in the project, or embarrass people by rejecting work I judged to be of poor quality, I indicated that I would buy every painting produced provided we could agree on a price beforehand.[47]

The men I approached readily agreed to participate in the project and on a price for each work. In my search for the best artists I let it be known that everyone in the village would be welcome to participate in the project, including women. As it happened, no women took up the offer. In this society, then as today, painting, like carving, is exclusively a man's activity.

Having determined that the project was viable I made a special trip to Port Moresby, the national capital, to purchase materials, as nothing suitable was available locally. Port Moresby had a flourishing art school where students from around the country could learn

47 A number of other researchers in the Sepik have also made collections of traditional designs on paper (see Forge 1973b; Dennett 1975; Clark and Thomas 2017:87-110; Cochrane 2023).

Western art techniques and there were several stores that stocked good quality painting materials. I purchased several hundred sheets of the largest and highest quality black paper I could find. These sheets were only slightly smaller than the average 'double' bark. The black colour was designed to replicate the dark grey of the clay ground on which Kwoma artists paint, both on bark and on wood. The rectangular shape of the paper replicated that of a 'double' bark (see Chapter 3) and would therefore be familiar to the artists. I also purchased a number of sheets of heavy-duty white paper to see if anyone was interested in using them. The bulk of the paint I purchased was water-based and as similar in colour as I could find to the indigenous white, red and yellow ochre. I also purchased a variety of other colours, such as blue and green, to see what use artists might make of them.

I also purchased three large sheets of unprimed artist's canvas and a variety of oil paints and appropriate brushes. My intention was to distribute these among the three men whose paintings on paper I found most interesting (e.g. Figure 11.1).

The exercise proved to be a great success. Over several weeks in early 1973 around twenty men produced a total of 300 paintings on paper, as well as three on canvas. Not all of the paintings were of equal quality but that was to be expected. The majority of the participants were older men who already had reputations as painters. But a number of younger men tried their hands as well.

One issue that quickly became apparent was that if the water-based paints I provided were left exposed to the air for too long before being used they dried rock-hard and had to be discarded. All of the participants therefore quickly learned that they had to keep any unused paint in containers that could be securely sealed. The indigenous pigments, in contrast, can be allowed to dry in a palette and then broken up with a stick, mixed with water and re-used whenever required.

A second issue that emerged was that when paint was applied liberally to make dotted lines, large flies would often land on the dots before they had dried, get paint on their feet and then walk around on adjacent unpainted areas of paper before being brushed away. This left a fine spattering of paint around the dots (e.g. Figure 11.4). The artists themselves were not especially bothered by this minor inconvenience and rarely made any attempt to paint out the spattering with other colours.

All of the participants enjoyed using the full range colours I had made available. With only a few exceptions (e.g. Figure 11.31) they applied them unmixed.

The three paintings on canvas that were produced were less successful from my perspective than the best of the works on paper. I put this down to two factors. One was the difficulty the artists experienced in laying out designs on surfaces that were much larger than those on which they were accustomed to working. The other was that a lack of suitable areas at the artists' individual houses for laying the canvases flat on the ground where they could be protected from the weather meant that they had to be painted hanging vertically on walls (Figure 11.1). Bark paintings, in contrast, are always produced with the bark lying flat on the ground. This gives artists the opportunity to walk around them, or turn them around, to view the designs from different angles and make adjustments if required. Men used the same technique when painting on paper.

The range of designs in the finished works coincided broadly with that in the barks on display in the village's men's house. A number of the paintings, however, depicted entities not found in these barks. One consisted of named individual spirits associated with the secret men's rituals that were then still being performed, principally the two named Yena

and Minja (Bowden 1983a, 2022). Individually named spirits are a common subject of carvings on posts and beams in men's houses but they were not depicted in any of the barks I had documented. Another new subject consisted of motifs used to decorate the large basketry dance masks associated with the Nawa ceremony, a public ritual. However, by the time I began fieldwork this ceremony had not been performed in full by any Kwoma group for several decades, though highly truncated versions of it were occasionally still being performed for the rare group of tourists who visited the village and during government-sponsored festivities at Ambunti (see Newton 1971:94).

Like the barks on display in men's houses, these paintings on paper provide many examples of the different ways in which particular entities can be depicted in two-dimensional designs. These include differences in the size of the motif depicting the main subject relative to that of the picture surface as a whole; how many times the motif depicting the main subject is reproduced in a design; and how many subsidiary motifs might be included. Examples of some of these variations, discussed in more detail below, are Nayikiya's two paintings of *kamaka* tree flowers (Figures 11.17 and 11.18), and Meyimbor's two representations of waterlily flowers (Figures 11.40 and 11.41).

If I were to make another collection of designs on paper today one thing I would do differently would be to require that at least some of the paintings were done with indigenous brushes. The men who participated in the project were more than happy to use the commercial brushes I provided. But not being a professional artist it only became apparent to me much later that the kind of brush used can significantly affect the texture of the paint applied and hence the overall 'aesthetic' impact of a design. It would have been instructive, therefore, to compare a set of works on paper done with the brushes I supplied with a set produced with indigenous implements – in the Kwoma case, with brushes made from chewed fibres of betel nut husks tied to short sticks. To his credit, when Anthony Forge made a similar collection of works on paper among the Abelam he required that they were all done with indigenous brushes (Forge 2017:37).

There was no alternative, however, to using store-bought paints. Indigenous pigments adhere well to the black-clay ground on which designs are painted on bark (or wood) but they would not have adhered as well to paper or canvas without the addition of a commercial binder, such as a wood glue, which I lacked.

The remainder of this chapter illustrates a selection of these paintings. With the exception of the one on canvas (Figure 11.1) all of the works illustrated are now in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne).[48] They form part of a much larger collection of Kwoma paintings and other artworks the Gallery acquired from me in 2001. The collection can be viewed online in the Gallery's catalogue.

48 The Gallery's catalogue does not identify me as the source of these works. However, under Gallery policy, as the source of these works I hold copyright in them.

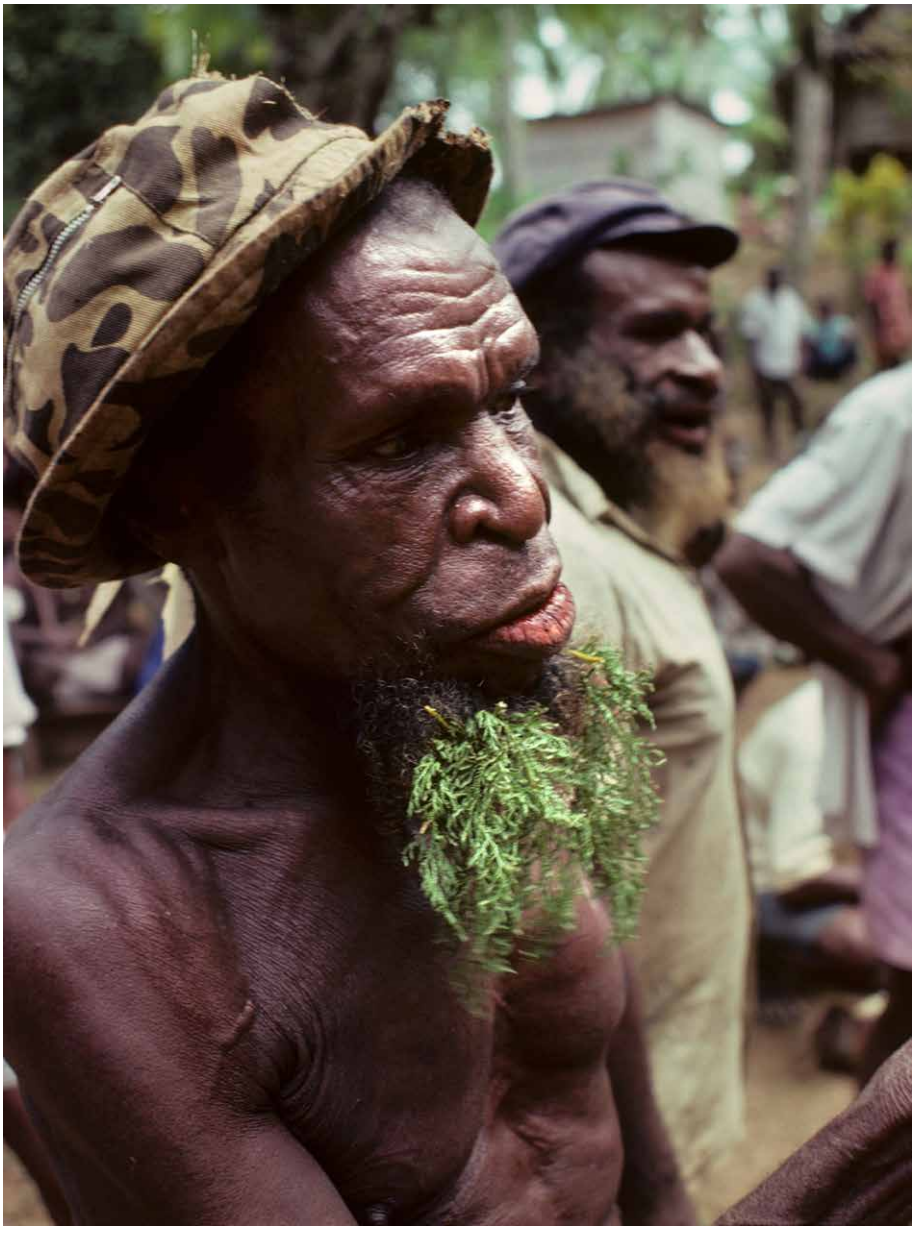

Figure 11.2. Nayikiya of Bangwis village attending a death payment, 1982.

Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village[49]

Biographical note

Of all of the artists who participated in this project the one who produced the most paintings was Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan (see Figures 11.1-11.21). Nayikiya was born around 1915 and died in the 1990s. In his late fifties at the time, he was one of his community's most active painters and sculptors and was also a master of ritual songs.

Nayikiya was one painter who had a distinctive personal style or 'hand' (*tapa*). In fact, his style was so distinctive that it enabled me to identify a number of barks by him among the hundreds on display on the ceiling of Wayipanal men's house. Although he never mentioned it, it later became apparent that he was one of a number of men who had produced barks, at their request, for several earlier researchers in this region in the 1950s and 60s. The distinctiveness of his style has also enabled me to identify a number of otherwise anonymous works by him in collections made by these earlier researchers. These include the Potter Collection at the University of Melbourne (Australia) and the Frankfurt Museum of World Cultures in Germany. The Frankfurt's collection of Kwoma paintings was acquired at the beginning of the 1960s by Eike Haberland and Meinhard Schuster. One work by Nayikiya in the Frankfurt collection is shown in the middle of the group of three paintings on page 90 of Haberland and Schuster's exhibition catalogue titled *Sepik: Kunst aus Neuguinea* (Haberland and Schuster 1964). Regrettably, Haberland and Schuster did not record the names of the artists whose work they acquired.

The photograph in Figure 11.2 shows Nayikiya attending a death payment held at Bangwis village in 1982. Death or 'head' payments are one of the obligatory forms of interclan transfers of wealth that are still made today (Figure 11.35). The wealth is in the form of shell valuables and other goods donated by close relatives of the deceased and distributed among a wide range of beneficiaries in other clans. (For a detailed account of these payments see Bowden 1988.) On this occasion Nayikiya was a spectator rather than a participant. Although a retiring man in everyday life he was a fiery debater during public meetings and a fearless defender of his own and his clan's interests. In the photo he is wearing several sprays of green *botiika* leaves in his beard. These leaves are symbolically associated with a man's willingness to defend himself and other members of his clan as energetically as required in intergroup contexts. By wearing these leaves in his beard he was advertising to everyone present that he was not a man to be trifled with. He donned the army surplus hat as a form of personal adornment. Formerly all adult men attending death payments and other inter-clan transactions, such as bridewealth payments, decorated themselves in the highest-prestige ornaments to which they were entitled, and carried spears and stone adzes. Nayikiya's nose was permanently flattened many years before this photograph was taken after being punched in the face by another member of his community during an argument. This gave his speaking (and singing) voice a very distinctive nasal tone.

---

49 Some of the information in this chapter updates that in the catalogue of the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV). This includes the spelling of some artists' names. For example, in the NGV's catalogue Nayikiya's name is spelt 'Neyikiya'. The artist's name can alternatively be pronounced 'Nalikiya'.

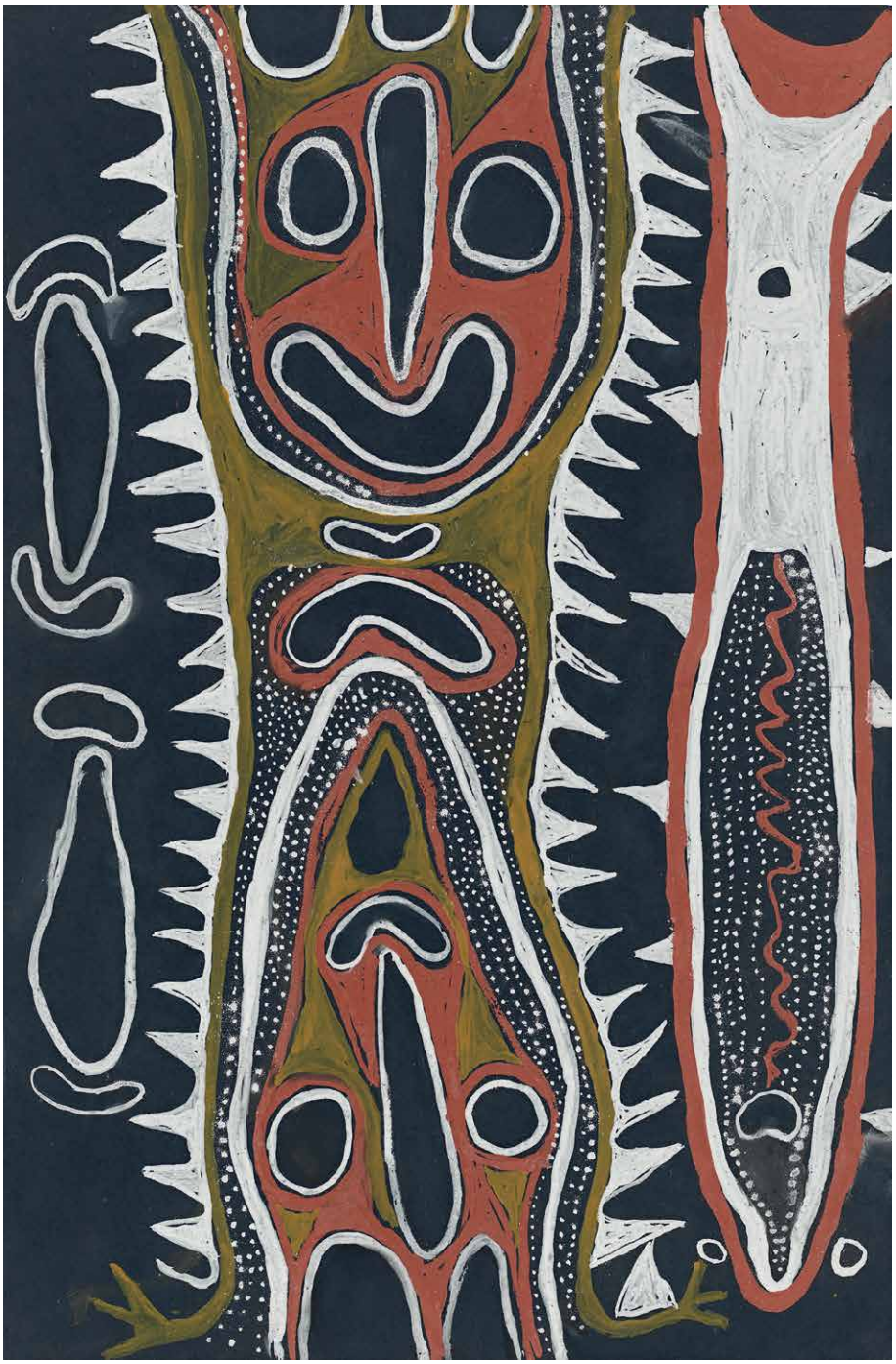

Figure 11.3. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan. An *arokomaka* spirit, 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.6 × 58.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.484.

The painting in Figure 11.3 depicts one of the many unnamed spirits that go by the generic term '*arokomaka*' (*aroko*, spirit; *maka*, anthropomorphic motif). These spirits are a common subject of bark paintings as well as low-relief carvings on beams in men's houses and on the finials of slit-gongs (Figures 11.5 and 11.6). Like all spirits, they are represented primarily by means of their 'faces' (*misoma*). In both painted and carved designs the face might be shown once or duplicated as in this painting. Here the two representations of the spirit's face are displayed in mirror reflection across a horizontal axis. Each face has a pair of eyes, a nose and a mouth. According to the artist, the other motifs were added 'for purely decorative effect'. The type of fish was not identified.

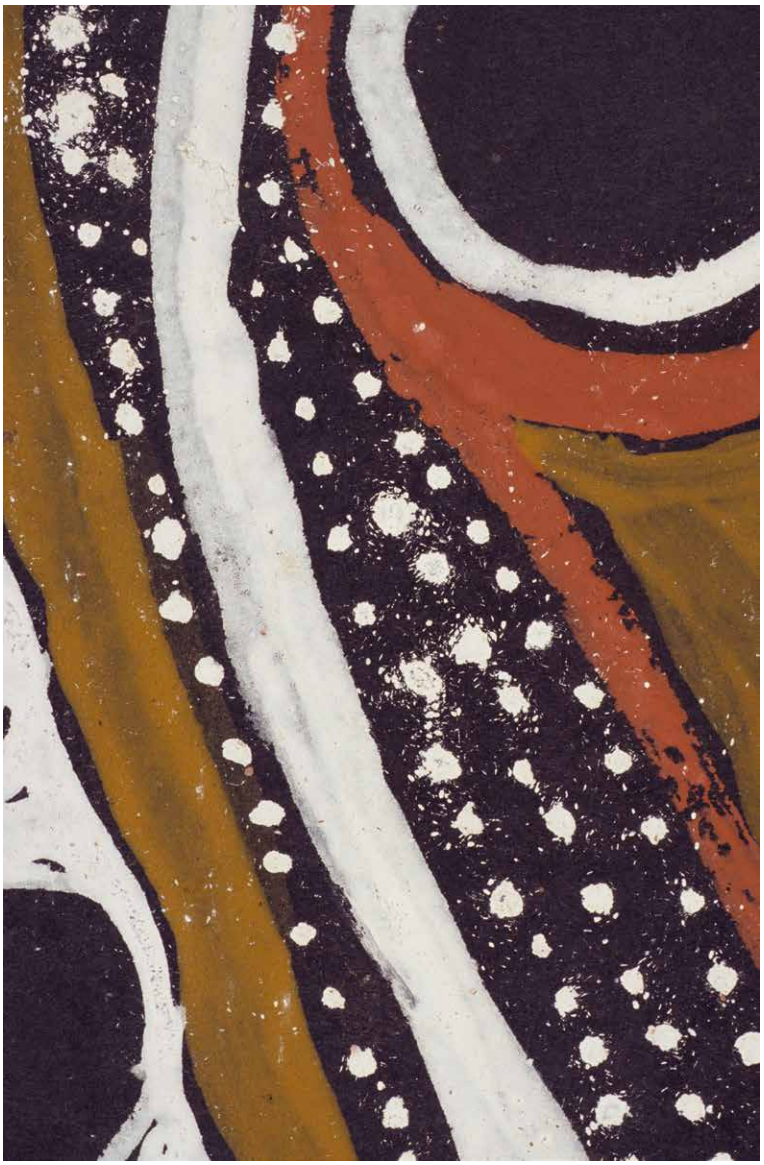

Figure 11.4. Detail of the painting in Figure 11.3. The spatter of white paint around the white dots was produced by large flies landing on the white dots while they were still wet and walking around on the paper before being brushed away.

Figure 11.5. The faces of unnamed *arokomaka* spirits on two slit-gongs in Wayipanal men's house. Both figures carved *c*1965. Photo 1987. The carving on the slit-gong in the foreground was done by Wulakawen of Bangwis village.

Figure 11.6. Face of an *arokomaka* spirit on the finial of a slit-gong in Wayipanal men's house. Figure carved *c*1940. Photo 1987.

The slit-gong in Figure 11.6 was made for the first of the men's houses to be constructed at Bangwis after that village was founded at the beginning of the 1940s. It was later transferred to the men's house named Omunyaw, which replaced the first building around 1950 (Bowden 2022, Figure 3). Later again it was transferred to Wayipanal, which replaced Omunyaw in the second half of the 1960s. All three buildings stood on the same site in the centre of the village. Wayipanal was the only one of these three buildings to be fully decorated with bark paintings and sculptures.

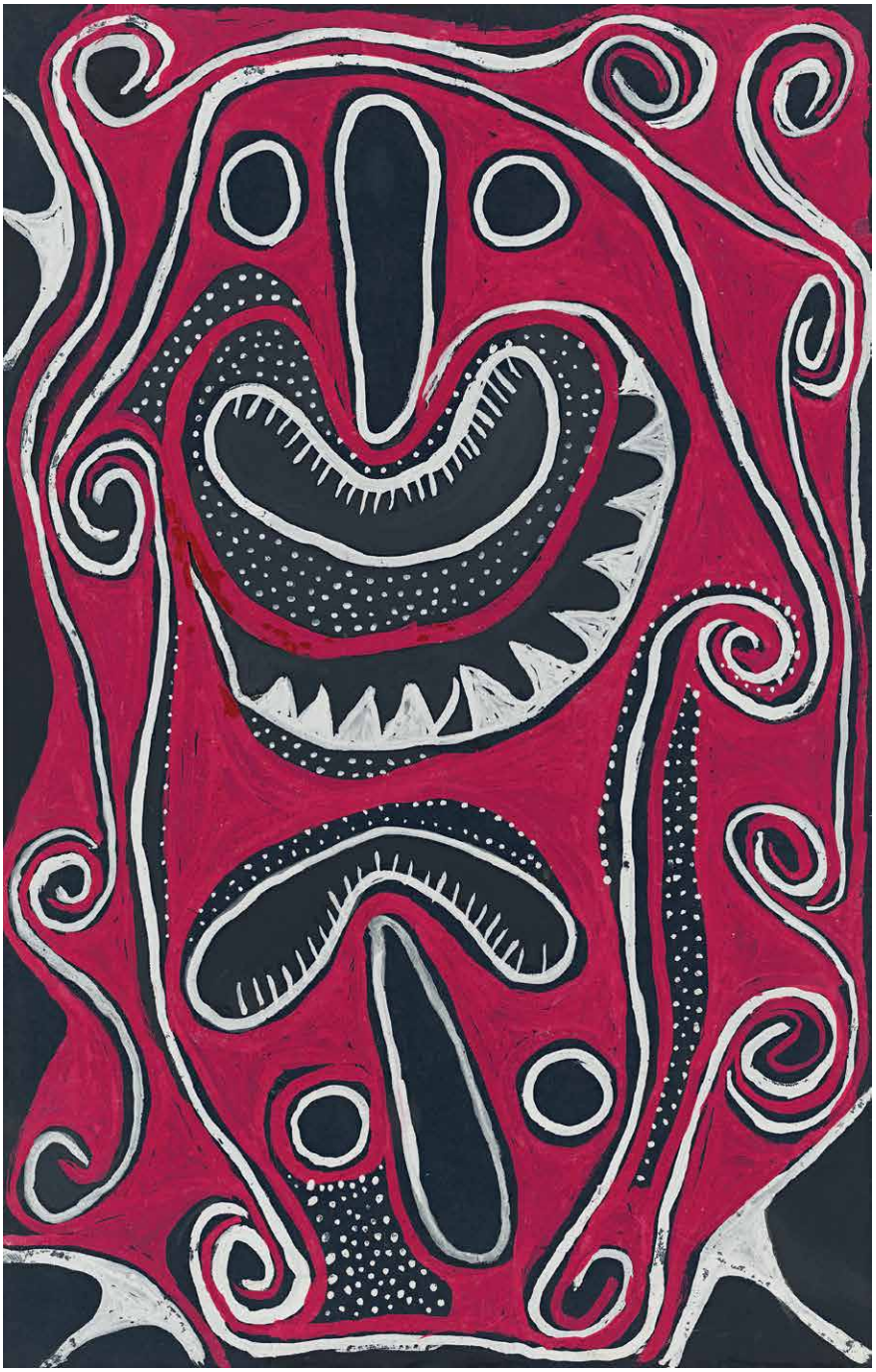

Figure 11.7. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. An *arokomaka* spirit, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101.0 x 72.0 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), 2001.496.

The spirit's face in Figure 11.7 is depicted twice in a design broadly characterised by mirror reflection across a horizontal axis. The two mouths have been given sets of 'teeth' (*pu*) represented by the rows of short white lines.

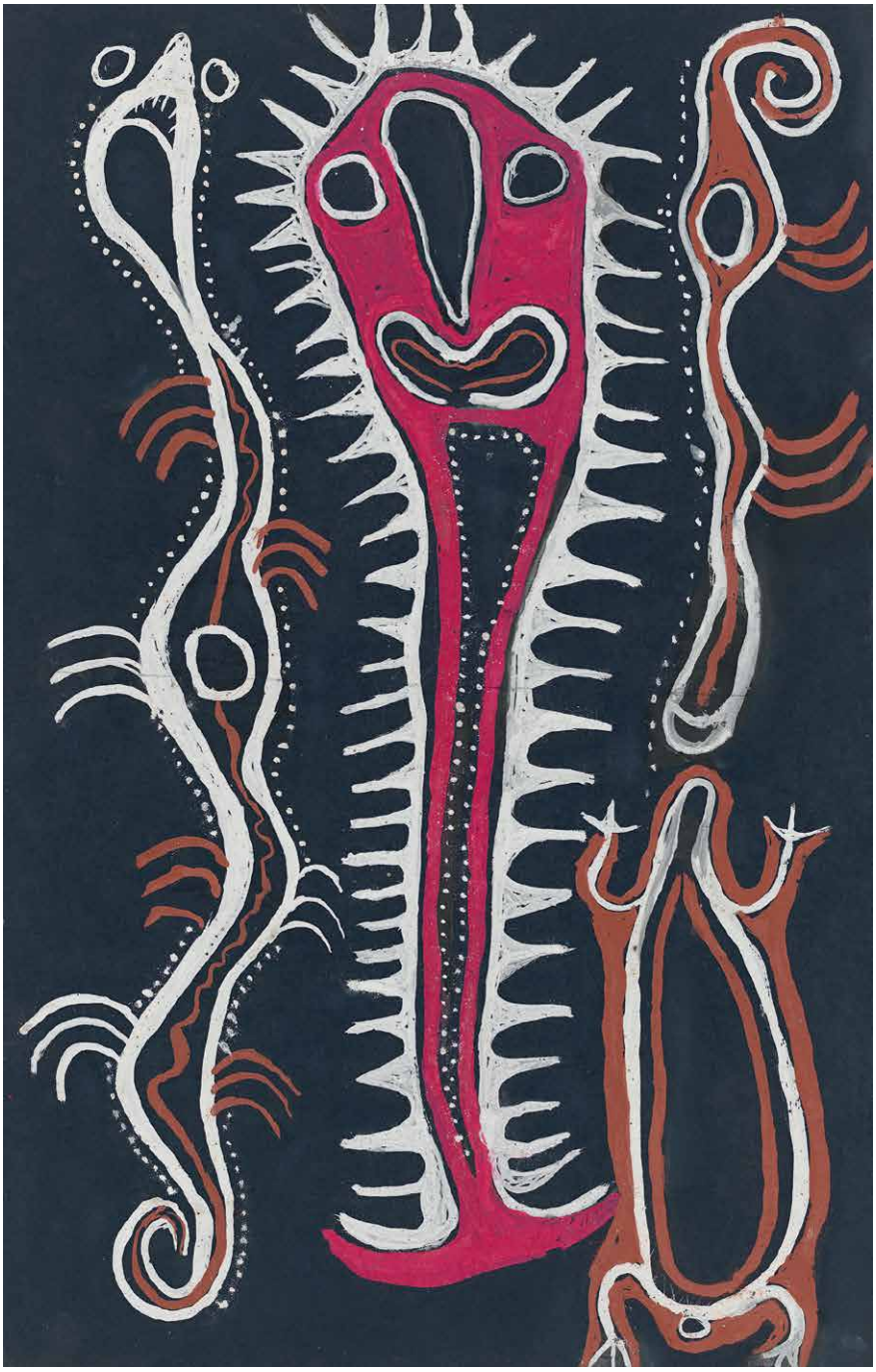

Figure 11.8. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. *Maway* (shooting star), 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.7 x 58.6 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.483.

As previously indicated (Chapter 6) a shooting star is thought to be the soul (*mayi*) of a deceased man of the highest status flying through the night sky on its way to one of the many lagoons distributed around the Washkuk Hills through which it descends into the underworld. A soul is thought to have the appearance of the person it once animated, and in paintings is depicted with an anthropomorphic face. In this work (Figure 11.8) the long red tail bordered by a sawtooth motif in white represents the trail a shooting star leaves in the night sky. For two other paintings on paper depicting shooting stars see Figures 11.30 and 11.33.

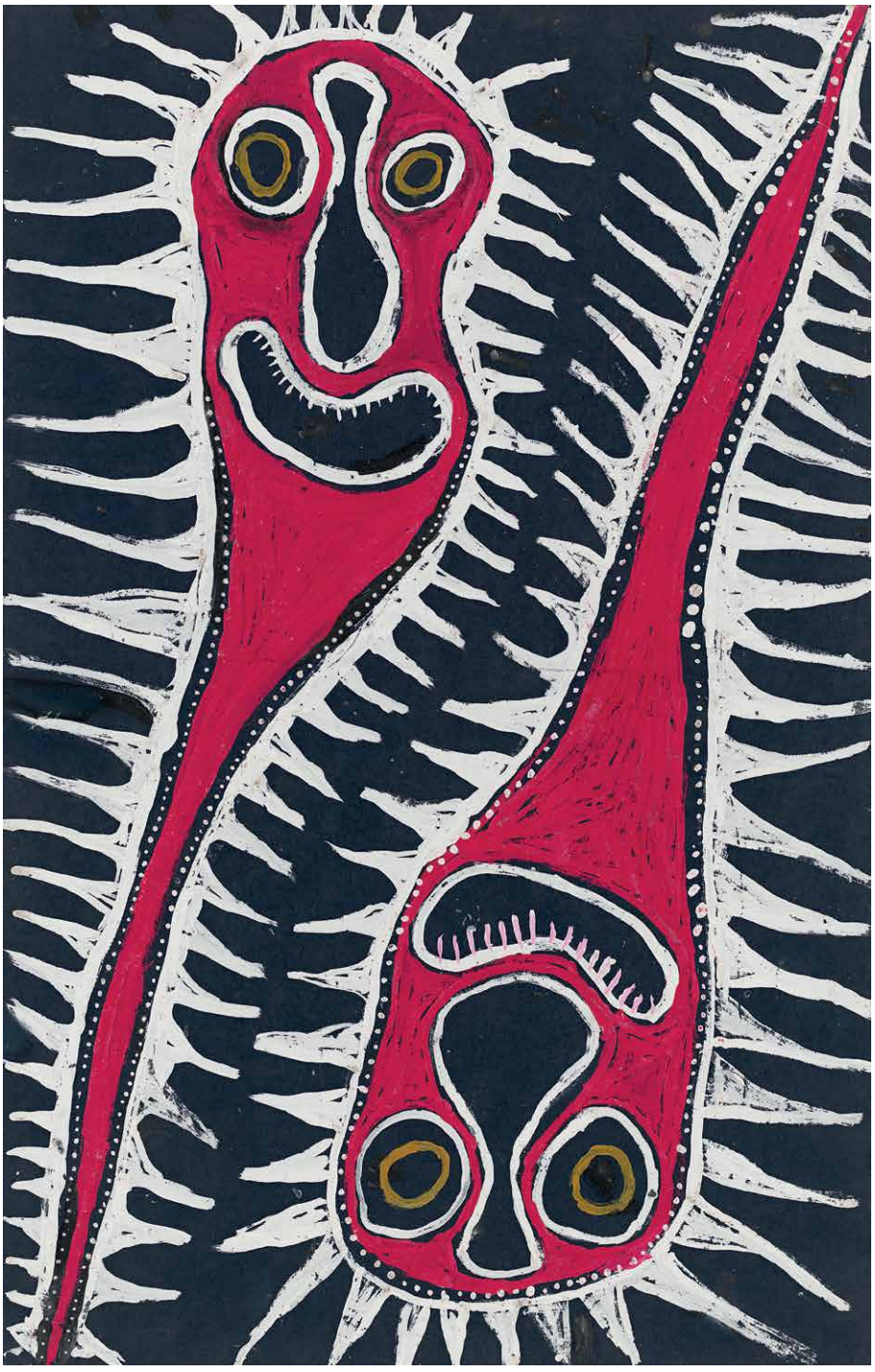

Figure 11.9. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. Mythical male figure named Masembeyakapa, 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.7 x 58.6 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.486.

The painting in Figure 11.9, characterised by rotation symmetry, consists of two identical halves one of which has been rotated 180 degrees. Each half is identical in form to the one the same artist used in the painting illustrated in Figure 11.8 to depict a shooting star. As noted earlier in this study, designs of the type illustrated here can also be used to depict shooting stars (see Figures 6.6 and 11.33) but in this case it depicts a well-known mythological figure named Masembeyakapa.

Most myths give expression to the idea that all major elements of Kwoma culture (*nobo*, 'path') were created at the beginning of history not by humans but by spirits. One of the ways myths communicate this idea is by postulating an earlier, pre-cultural, period in which spirits in human form behaved in ways that by modern standards were 'wrong' (*kapasek*) and even highly offensive morally but later came to behave in ways that were morally 'good' (*kepi*). In doing so they established the precedents that guide people's lives today (see also Bowden 2022:19-60). This transition from a pre-cultural to a modern human world is often associated with the building of named men's houses that became the prototypes of the buildings bearing the same names that people construct today. By equating the transition from a pre-cultural to a cultural state with the origin of these buildings, myths are assigning a central place to these structures in modern Kwoma culture.

The mythological figure named Masembeyakapa is a prominent actor in a myth of this type.[50] This describes the building, by spirits in human form, of the first men's house named Wambon. This became the prototype, among others, of the men's house of the same name constructed at Washkuk village at the beginning of the 1980s (see Bowden 2022, Figures 11-13; 2023b [Part 2], Figures 7-9).

The myth tells how a man who was out hunting in the forest comes across a village that has been abandoned by all of its former occupants except for one woman. Atypically for Kwoma women, she is living on her own.[51] The hunter, named Apindu, decides to settle down with the woman and have a family with her. However, the woman has recently ceased to menstruate and is now beyond the age of childbearing. But Apindu restores her fertility by feeding her magical substances and in quick succession the couple have a boy and a girl.

When their children reach physical maturity, the time when Kwoma of both sexes traditionally married, the parents visit a number of neighbouring villages to find a wife for their son. But they have no wealth in the form of shell valuables (see Figure 11.35) to make the required bridewealth payment and their requests for a wife for their son are repeatedly rebuffed.[52] After talking the matter over between themselves the couple decide that they have no option but to encourage their two children to marry incestuously. The children are deeply embarrassed by this suggestion but eventually go ahead and become husband and wife.[53]

---

50 This myth is also discussed in Bowden 2022:32-39.

51 Listeners to the myth would know that in this society a woman never lives on her own but always in the company of an adult man who provides her with protection and land on which to find food. This man is either a husband or other adult male relative.

52 Listeners to the story know that in this society the only way a man can obtain a wife, either for himself or a son, is by 'paying' for her with shell valuables. The direct exchange of women is formally prohibited. A sister or daughter, therefore, cannot be given in exchange for a wife (Bowden 1983b, 1988).

53 Listeners to this story would know that marriage between a brother and sister is not only prohibited but that if a man attempted to take his sister for a wife, or even attempted to engage in sexual relations with her, traditionally he would either have been killed or banished from his community. Today his kinsmen would take him to court and demand that he serve a long prison sentence.

Once the children have married, the father, Apindu, tells his son that to complete their new community they should construct their own ceremonial house. They immediately set about the task and once the frame has been put in place they invite, in the customary manner, men from all of the surrounding communities to help thatch the roof. But at the end of the work instead of serving their helpers in the normal way a sumptuous meal of all of the choicest meats available, such as boiled pork, along with copious quantities of sago, they offer them earthworms. The helpers are disgusted by this and mock their hosts for serving them food fit only for wild pigs.

Once the building has been completed and given a name – Wambon – the father and son decide to inaugurate it by holding a performance of the age-grade ceremony termed Nal ('Red').[54] In this ceremony traditionally men both from the host community and surrounding groups incarcerated themselves in a men's house for several weeks, or even months, to renew their physical and mental energy. Men's energy, Kwoma traditionally believed, progressively declined in the course of everyday life through contact with different 'cold' (*neekiiriya*) entities, such as especially cold water, cold foods and sexually mature women, who are thought to be 'cold' as a category – in contrast to men who are ideally 'hot' (*hi uwu*). During the ceremony they renewed their vigour, first, by wading into a nearby stream and draining copious quantities of old, 'cold' blood out of their bodies by making deep incisions in their tongues and penises. The stream carried this 'cold' blood away (Whiting 1941:205-6). Returning to the men's house they then restored their bodily heat by consuming a variety of specially prepared 'hot' foods mixed with magical substances. This renewed bodily heat gave them the capacity to carry out with maximum effectiveness all specifically men's activities, such as painting, carving, performing rituals and fighting in intertribal warfare. In this case, however, instead of inviting men from surrounding communities to participate in their ceremony with them, Apindu and his son exclusively invite forest animals, such as wild pigs, cassowaries and bandicoots. Unlike humans today, they treat these wild animals as friends and as an important part of their community.

When the ceremony is approaching its conclusion, marked by a day of public dancing and singing, Apindu discovers that there is an uneven number of participants in the ceremony and that he is left without a personal dancing partner. In this ceremony the practice was for the men to divide into pairs for the public singing and dancing. Lacking a dancing partner Apindu decides to visit one of the neighbouring communities to ask a friend to play this role. This is the man named Masembeyakapa depicted in Nayikiya's painting (Figure 11.9).

Masembeyakapa readily accepts Apindu's invitation to participate in the final day of the festivities. Before Apindu leaves to return home his friend offers him a sumptuous meal of the best foods he has available. This includes boiled pork. Apindu, however, recoils in disgust at the sight of the pork. He explains that he and his family have never killed forest animals and used them for food but regard them as friends and as a key part of their social network. He adds that representatives of all of the major groups of forest animals are actually participating in the Nal ceremony with him.

---

54 By the time I began fieldwork the Nal ceremony had not been performed by any Kwoma group for several decades.

Figure 11.10. Marak of Washkuk village leading men in a dance named Kwaya on the dance ground in front of his village's men's house during a performance of the Yena ceremony in December 1973.

His host is shocked by this news and decides to change Apindu's mind about the foods he eats. He therefore urges his guest, despite his misgivings, to taste just a tiny piece of the cooked pork he has offered him. Apindu does so. To his surprise he discovers that it is delicious and quickly consumes the rest of the serve.

Having introduced him to the pleasures of eating pork, Masembeyakapa now urges Apindu to stop treating forest animals as friends and begin killing them and using them for food. He suggests that during the remainder of the ceremony, before the public festivities begin, Apindu and his son progressively take representatives of each of the animals undergoing the rite with them into the forest and there kill and eat them. He adds that on the final day he will bring a large group of men with him and help Apindu and his son ambush and kill the wild pigs, cassowaries and the other animals that emerge from the forest to participate in the dancing and singing.

Apindu accepts his advice. After returning home, and well before public festivities begin, he and his son over a number of days treacherously take representatives of all of the different forest animals undergoing the rite with them into the forest. They tell them they are going to give them additional magical substances to eat to enhance their

strength. But when they are out of sight and sound of the men's house they kill and cook and eat them.

On the final day of the ceremony, before any animals have emerged from the forest to participate in the festivities, Apindu's friend Masembeyakapa arrives with a large group of men from his community. They help construct a tall platform in front of the men's house that will be strong enough to support all of the humans present. After completing the platform they place a large number of spears on top of it. The plan is that at a signal from Masembeyakapa all of the humans will climb up on to the platform and from there, safely out of their reach, the men will rain the spears down on the unsuspecting animals below.

Not long after the platform has been completed forest animals begin arriving in large numbers. The singing and dancing gets underway in front of the new building (Figure 11.10). Then, when the signal is given, all of the humans climb up on to the platform. As soon as they do so the men pick up the spears and begin hurling them at the animals below. A slaughter ensues.

When they realise that they are coming under attack, the two leaders of the most formidable of the forest animals – the wild pigs and cassowaries – retreat for safety to the edge of the clearing in which the men's house stands. From there they denounce Apindu and his son for their treachery. They tell them that henceforth wild pigs, cassowaries and other forest animals will no longer treat humans as friends but as enemies and that whenever they find one of their gardens in the forest they will plunder it for food. From that point on in time, the myth indicates, humans have hunted forest animals for food and no longer treat them as part of their society. In the case of Apindu and his son in particular, their killing of forest animals and their use of them of food completes their transition from a pre-cultural state in which they behaved in bizarre and 'incorrect' ways, to one where they behaved normally and 'correctly' by modern standards.

In the 1970s when Nayikiya produced his painting (Figure 11.9), all Kwoma adults were familiar with this myth as sections of it, in song form, were regularly performed in the ceremonies that were still being held. Paintings like the one illustrated, therefore, served to remind people how culture heroes such as Masembeyakapa helped created their society as they know it today.[55]

55 There is a remarkable parallel of this story in South Asian myth, where animals, once friends of humans, become enemies when they start to be hunted for food (Dumézil 1988:81).

As discussed in Chapter 6, representations of flying foxes show the animals dorsally with their wings outstretched as if they are flying. This work (Figure 11.11), although highly stylised, is one example. Different depictions of flying foxes vary greatly in the amount of anatomical detail they include. Here the artist has reduced the animal's dog-like head to a simple outline in white with ears attached. In keeping with the fact that flying foxes as a category are 'male' (*ma*), the artist has given the animal male genitalia.

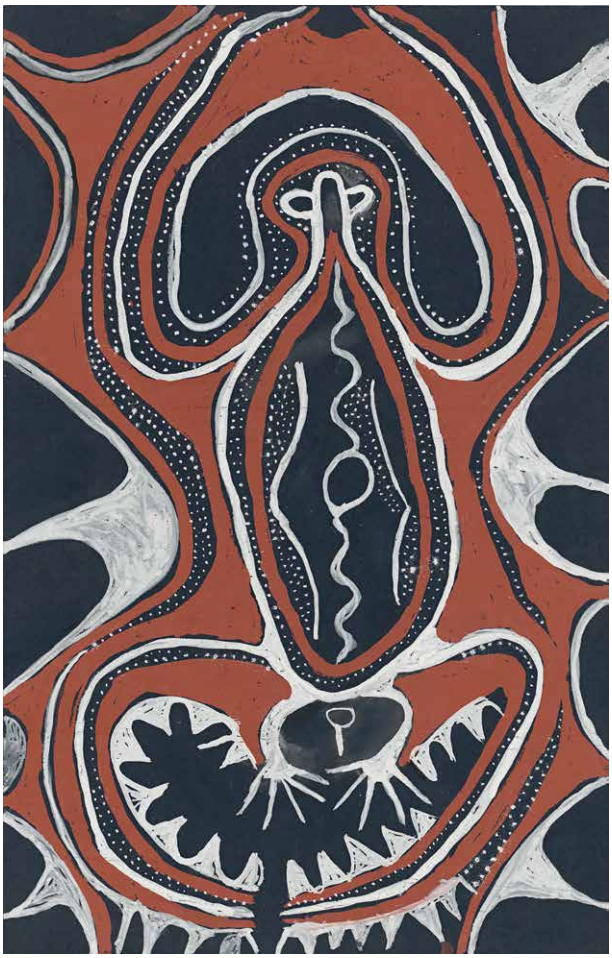

Figure 11.11. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. *Apokibi* (flying fox), 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.6 × 58.8 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.485.

Figure 11.12. Ripples on water, of the type depicted in the paintings in Figures 11.13 and 11.14, made by a Kwoma canoe travelling upriver from Ambunti towards the Washkuk Hills, which can be seen in the distance, 2008.

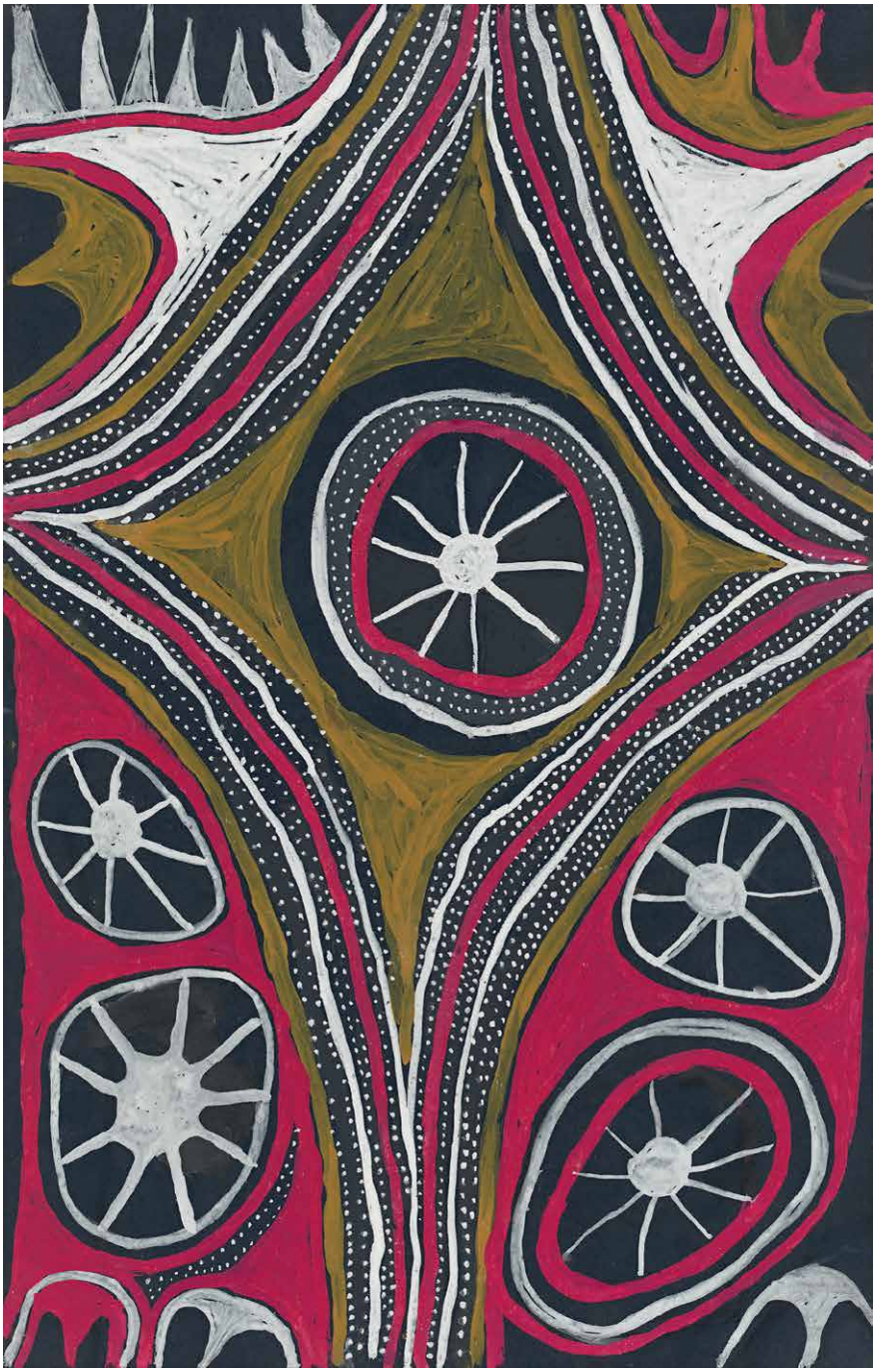

Figure 11.13. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. Ripples on water (*uku vel vel)*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.7 × 58.8 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.494.

In this painting (Figure 11.13) the black circular forms with white roundels in their centres depict fruit of the *bodi* tree (see Figure 2.9).

Figure 11.14. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. Ripples on water (*uku vel vel*), 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.6 × 58.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.488.

In this design (Figure 11.14) the black circular forms with white roundels in their centres depict fruit of the *bodi* tree (see Figure 2.9).

Figure 11.15. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. *Moyi*, a type of spiny fish, 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.6 × 58.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.492.

The *moyi* fish, referred to in Tok Pisin as '*pis nil*' ('a fish with spines'), is highly prized as a food but has prominent dorsal spines that can readily puncture the skin. In this radically 'abstract' painting (Figure 11.15) the spines are depicted by the parallel white horizontal lines.

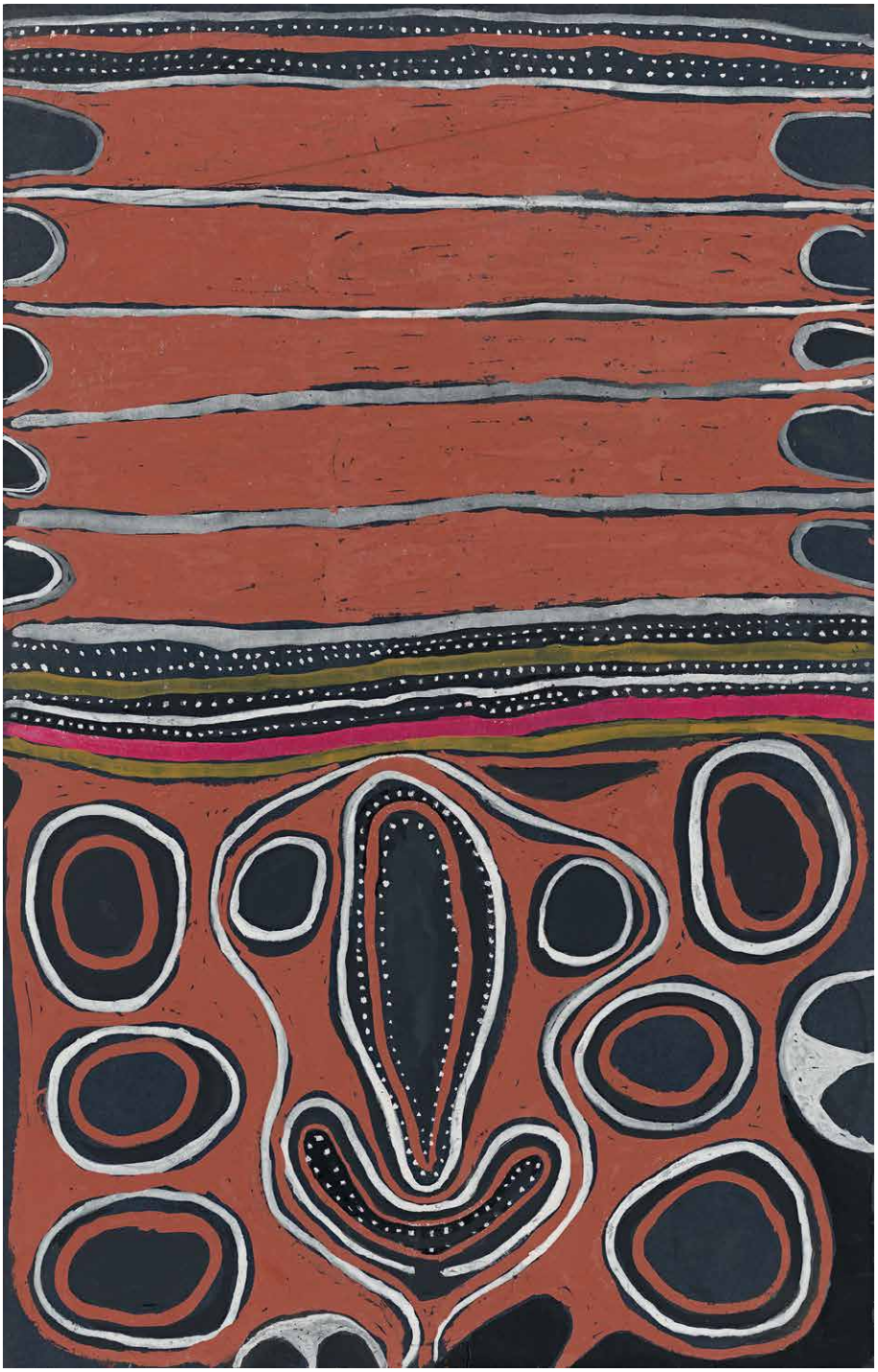

Figure 11.16. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. A *moyi* fish in the top half of image (see also Figure 11.15) and the 'face' of a scorpion (*mediigiiriigiirii*) in the lower half, 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.7 × 58.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.489.

Figure 11.17. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. The showy white flowers of the *kamaka* tree, 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.6 × 58.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.498.

Figure 11.18. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. The showy white flowers of the *kamaka* tree, 1973. Gouache on paper, 63.7 × 50.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.505.

The paintings in Figures 11.17 and 11.18, one on black paper and one on white, both depict the showy white flowers of a small tree named *kamaka*. The flowers are said to be similar in colour and size of those of the frangipani tree. In both paintings the flowers are represented by circular forms. The majority of the circular forms have white or black roundels at their centre which are connected to the enclosing circles by short straight lines; the lines distinguish the separate petals (or possibly bracts). The *kamaka* tree is the traditional source of the timber used for the handles of the adzes used for chopping pith out of a felled sago-palm trunk. The implements, termed *kamaka* (or *kamaka tapa*; *tapa*, branch), are named after the tree.

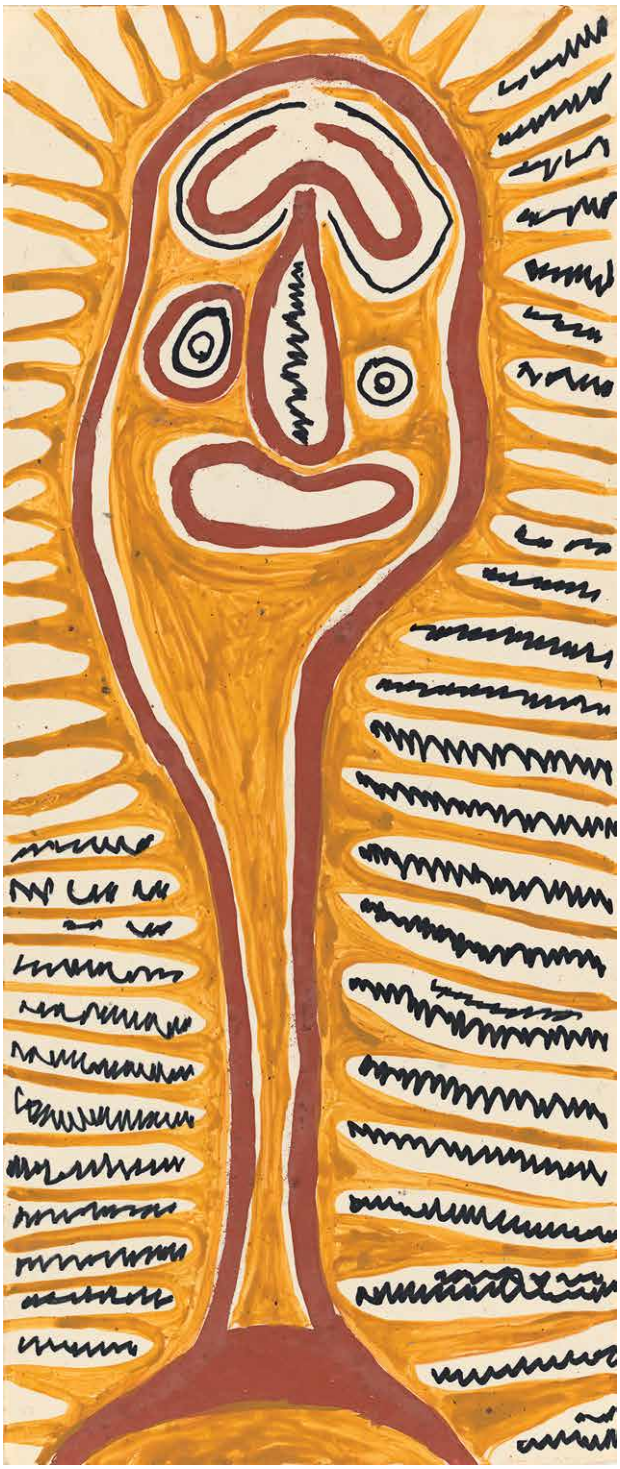

Figure 11.19. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. Centipede (*medii*). Gouache on paper, 77.3 × 32.6 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.511.

The painting in Figure 11.19 depicts the centipede's head together with its long body and the sting at the end of its tail. Its numerous legs are represented by the yellow lines radiating out from the body.

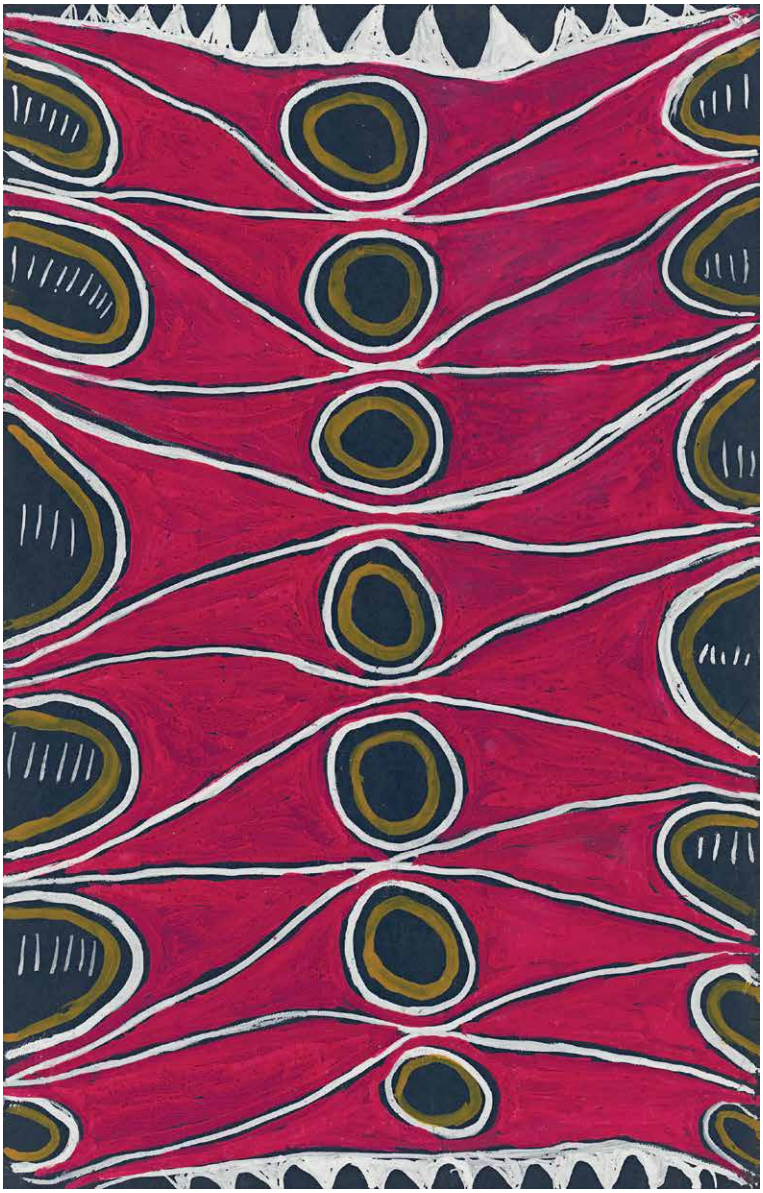

Figure 11.20. Nayikiya of Meyimbambur clan, Bangwis village. Non-representational design. Gouache on paper, 91.7 × 58.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.487.

In contrast to other paintings on paper by the same artist illustrated above Nayikiya described this painting (Figure 11.20), in Tok Pisin, both as a 'free' design (TP '*pri*'), by which me meant that it was not copyrighted by any particular group and, highly atypically, as 'non-representational' (TP '*mak nating*').

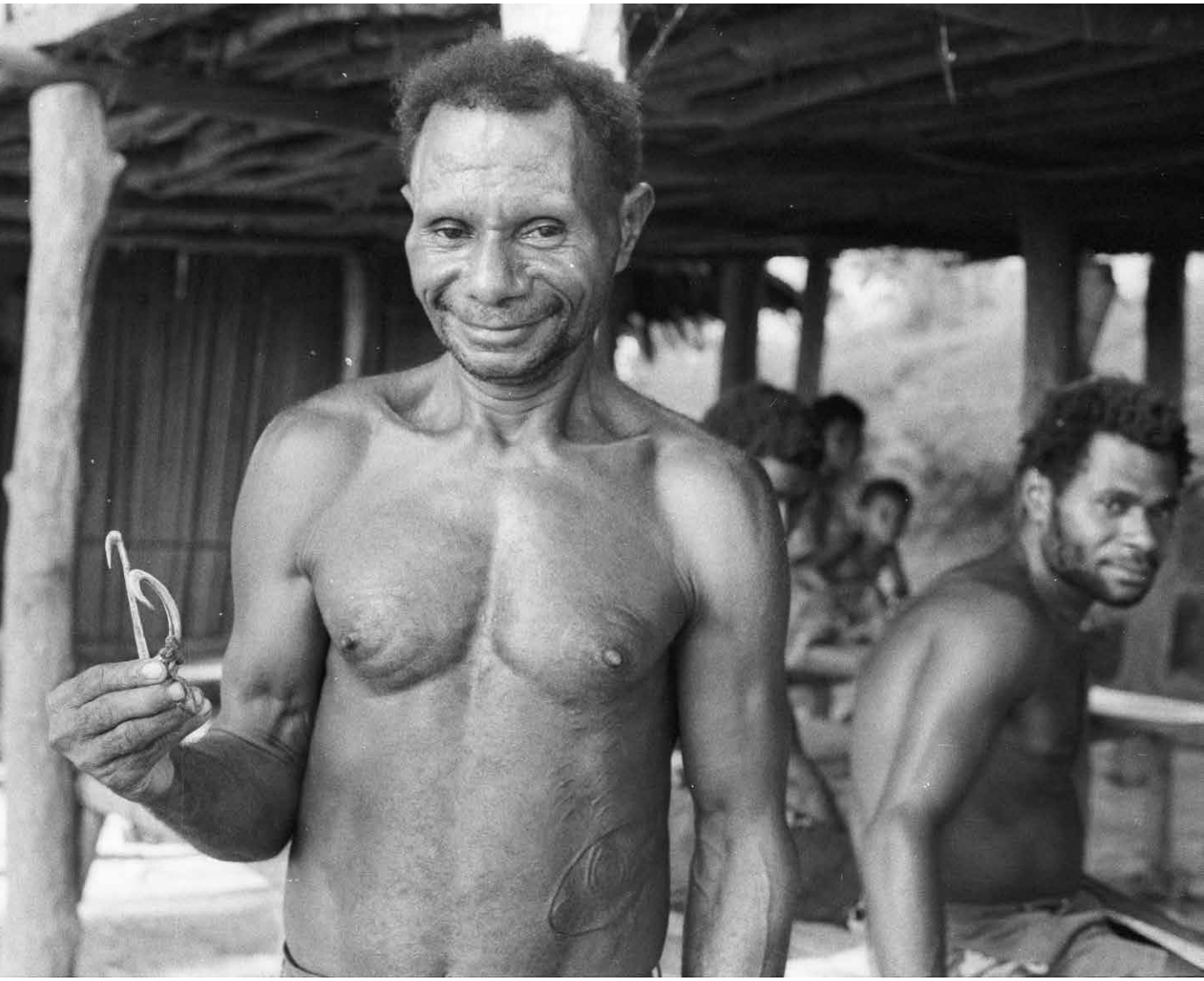

Figure 11.21. The painter and sculptor Apakwinya of Hipo clan, Bangwis village, 1973. He is shown holding two pre-contact fish hooks. His son Yesu is in the background looking on.

Apakwinya of Hipo clan, Bangwis village

Biographical note

Apakwinya of Hipo clan (*c*1925-*c*2000) was one of his village's most active painters and sculptors.[56] In the works he produced on paper for me he delighted in experimenting with non-indigenous colours, especially bright, highly saturated blues and yellows. He produced many of the barks on display in Wayipanal men's house and the two men's houses named Nggeyasatuk and Minjawolar (Figure 5.1) constructed in the late 1970s. All three buildings were masterly examples of Kwoma traditional architecture.

In the photograph Apakwinya is shown holding two pre-contact fish hooks which one of his clan forebears obtained, in the second half of the nineteenth century, from a Mayo-speaking totemic kinsman belonging to the Yasiyan tribe. At that time the Yasiyan people were located at the southern end of the Washkuk Hills. Today they are located at Yesan (= Yessan, = Yasiyan) village on the south side of the Sepik in the Yesan Hills (see Map). When the Yasiyan were located in the Washkuk Hills the Honggwama tribe, to which the artist's clan belongs, had its settlement at the northern end of the Washkuk range. Interaction between the two communities was common despite the fact that they belonged to different language groups. This took the form of regular participation in each other's ceremonies and intermarriage. Multilingualism made the interaction possible. Fish hooks of the kind illustrated were made from both shell and bone.

56 In the National Gallery of Victoria's catalogue this man's name is spelt 'Apokwinya'.

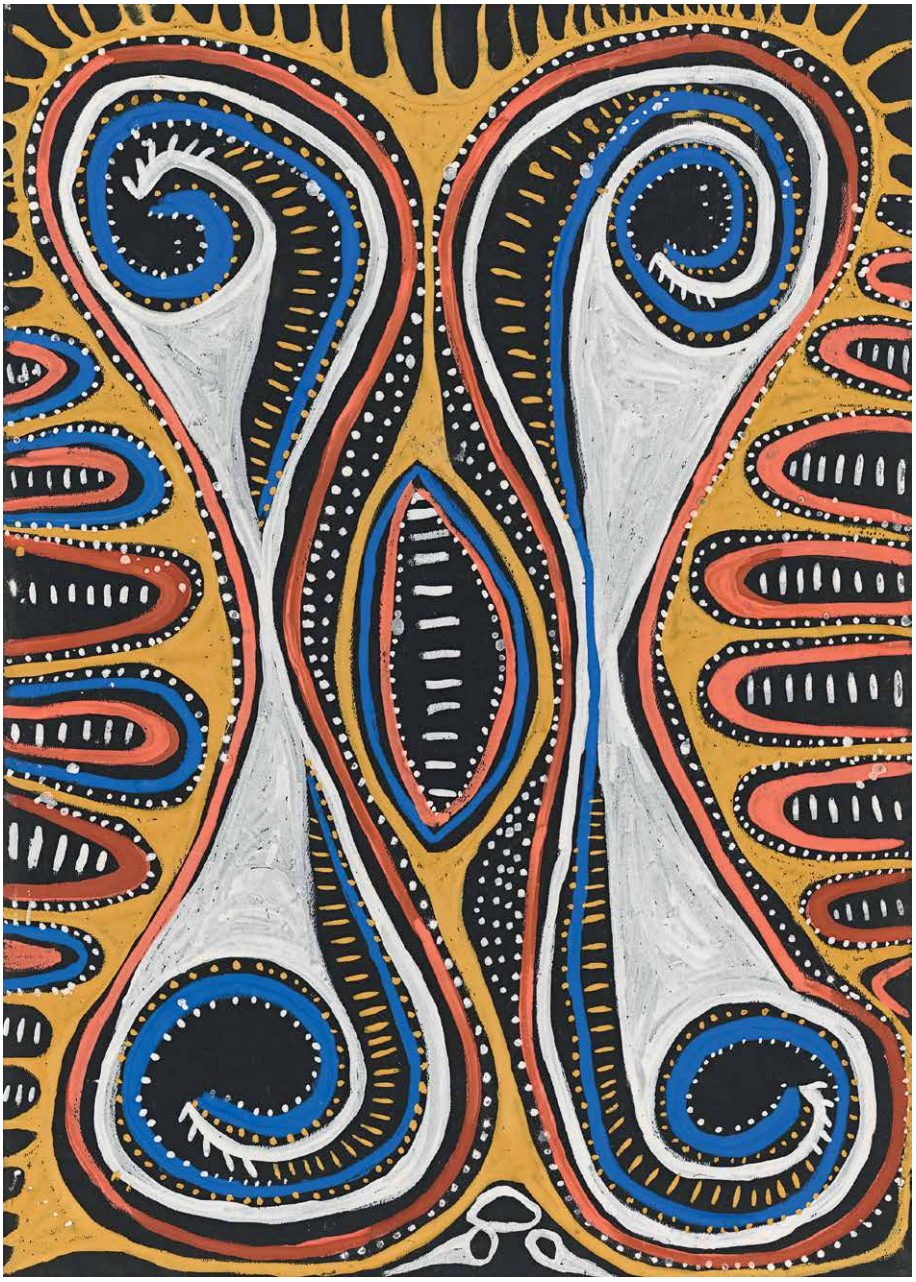

Figure 11.22. Apakwinya of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. Black cockatoo (*wonyiwaga*), 1973. Gouache on paper, 101 × 72 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.467.

Figure 11.23. Apakwinya of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. Two representations of the 'face' (*misoma*) of a water-walking insect termed *arokojawiyogo*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101 × 72 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.468.

Figure 11.24. Apakwinya of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. A *gwiyibi* bat, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101 × 72 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.469.

The bat (Figure 11.24) is represented in highly stylised form six times. In each case its torso takes the form of a black pointed oval outlined in yellow and its outstretched wings triangular forms outlined in red, blue and white. These small bats dart around villages at high speed at dawn and dusk, especially after rain.

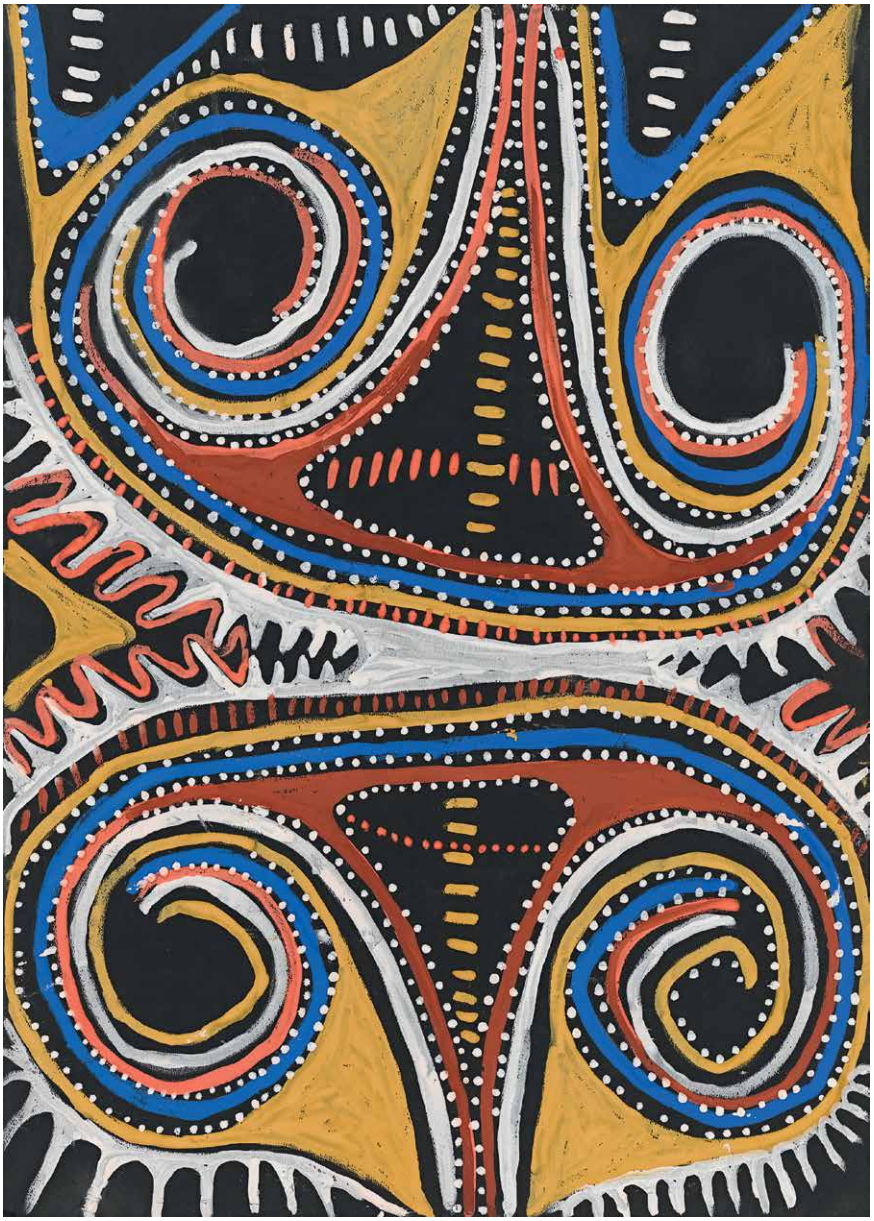

Figure 11.25. Apakwinya of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. Two representations of a small water-walking insect termed *makwiilajiir*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101 × 72 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.470.

In Figure 11.25 the two representations of the insect are displayed in mirror reflection in the upper and lower halves of the painting respectively. In each case the triangular black form with a column of yellow dashes running down its centre represents the insect's body and the curved lines on either side its legs.

Figure 11.26. Apakwinya of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. Two representations of the 'face' of a ground-dwelling wasp termed *boboj*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101 × 72 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.472.

In Figure 11.26 the wasp's face is reproduced twice, each reflecting the other across a horizontal mirror line.

Figure 11.27. Apakwinya of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. Representation of a design painted on Nawa basketry masks owned by the artist's clan, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101 x 72 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.473.

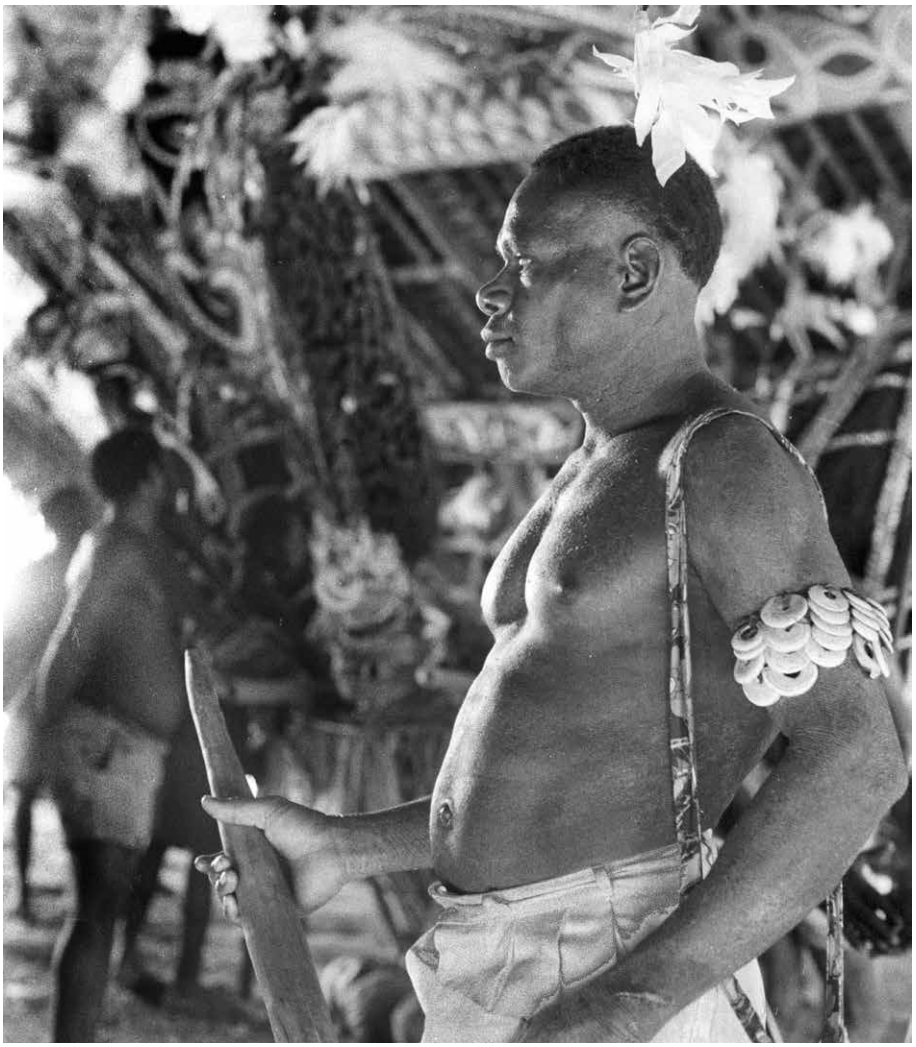

Figure 11.28. Manggwiyow of Hipo clan, Bangwis village, 1973.

Manggwiyow of Hipo clan, Bangwis village

Biographical note

Manggwiyow (born *c*1935) was not among his community's best-known artists but he was a gifted painter and an active contributor of barks to all three of the fully decorated men's houses that stood in Bangwis during my period of fieldwork. He was also knowledgeable ritually and participated regularly in all of the ceremonies his community performed. In the photograph he is shown playing a slit-gong during a performance of the Yena ceremony at Bangwis village in December 1973 (Bowden 1983a, 2022). The sculptures on display can be seen behind him.

Figure 11.29. Manggwiyow of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. A long-nosed fish termed *jagiir*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.6 × 59.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.449.

The long-nosed fish in this striking design (Figure 11.29) is shown three times, twice in large images and once in a much smaller one. It is evidently one of the several types of freshwater sawfish found in New Guinea (Ryan 1972:405). The artist did not identify the two other aquatic creatures depicted.

Figure 11.30. Manggwiyow of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. Shooting star (*maway*), 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.6 × 58.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.500.

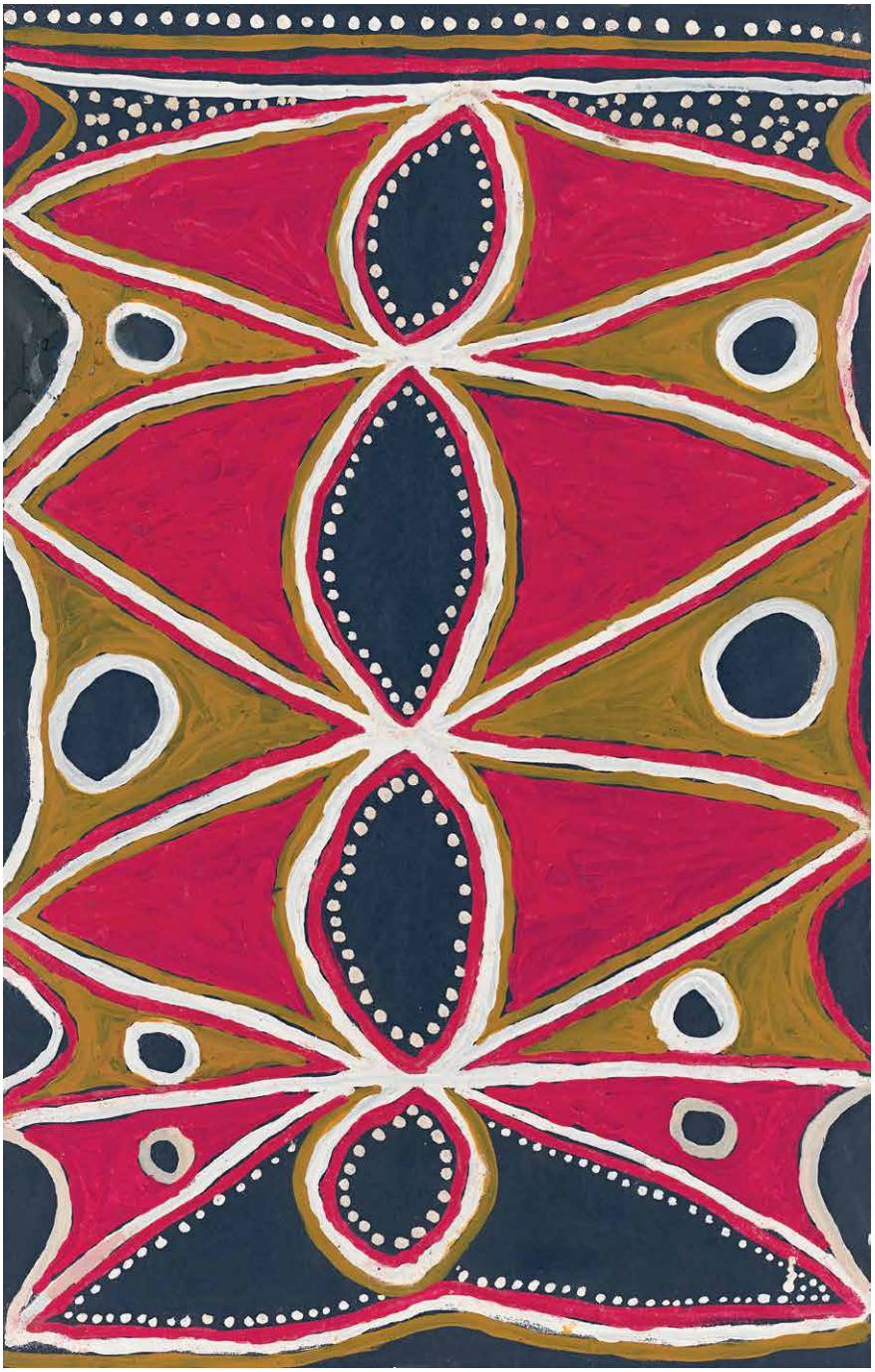

Figure 11.31. Manggwiyow of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. A small bat termed *apopeya*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.7 × 58.5 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.453.

The bat (Figure 11.31) is depicted four times in images arranged in a column running down the long axis of the design. The black pointed ovals represent its body and the adjacent triangular forms – red in three cases and black at the bottom – its outstretched wings.

Figure 11.32. Wayikola of Awonow clan, Bangwis village, 1973.

Wayikola of Awonow clan, Bangwis village

Biographical note

Wayikola was born well before first European contact, around 1895, and died around 1980. He was not one of his village's most active painters but like most other men in his community he contributed barks to Wayipanal men's house when it was constructed in the mid-1960s. Despite being close to eighty at the time, he welcomed the opportunity to produce some paintings on paper. Two are illustrated in Figures 11.33 and 11.34. In the photograph he is wearing a spray of bird of paradise plumes attached to his hat. For a man of his age, who grew up under effectively fully traditional circumstances, these are a sign that he had participated in the killing of a member of another tribe when warfare was still being practised.

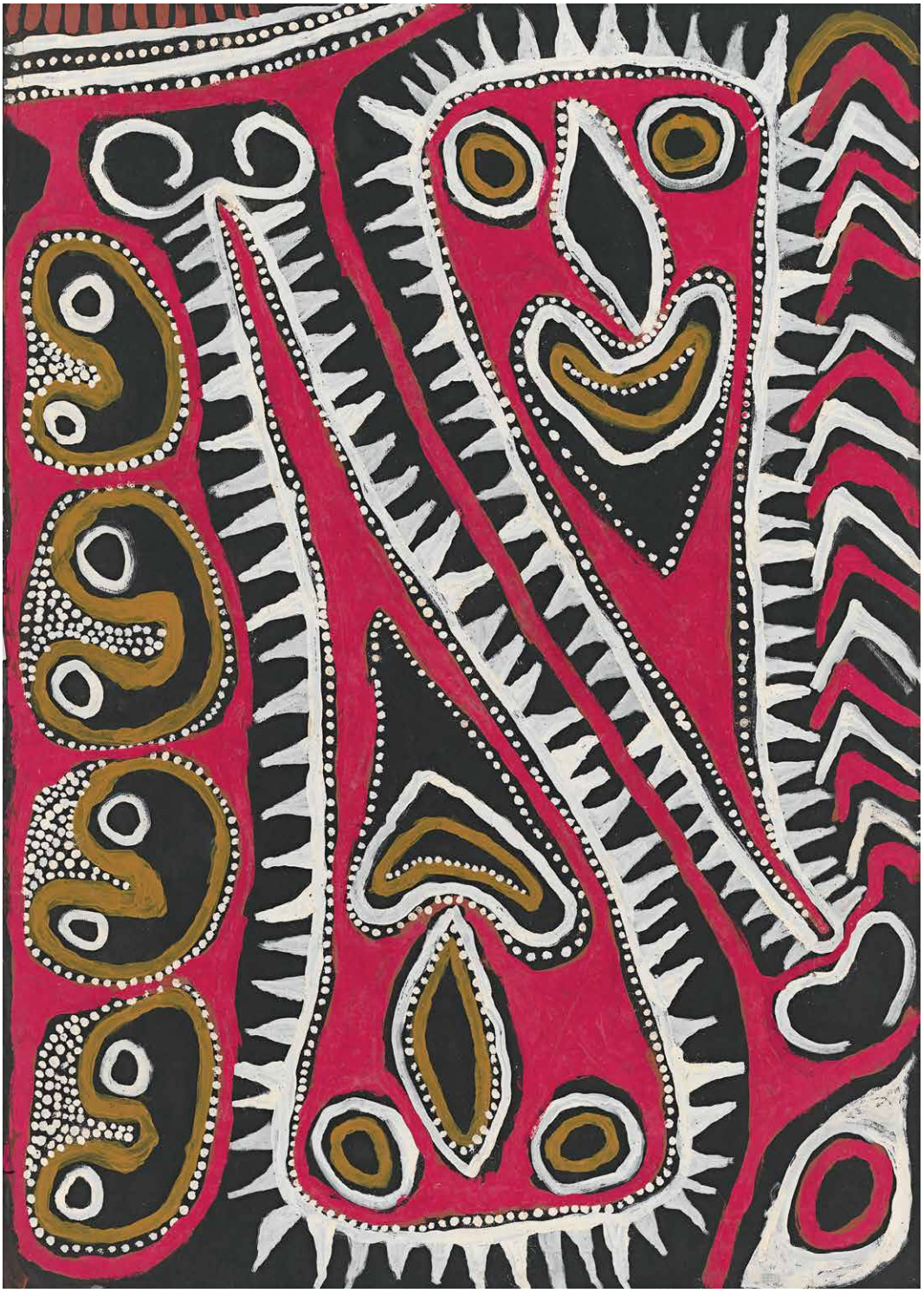

Figure 11.33. Wayikola of Bangwis village. Shooting star (*maway*), 1973. Gouache on paper, 101.0 × 72.0 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.454.

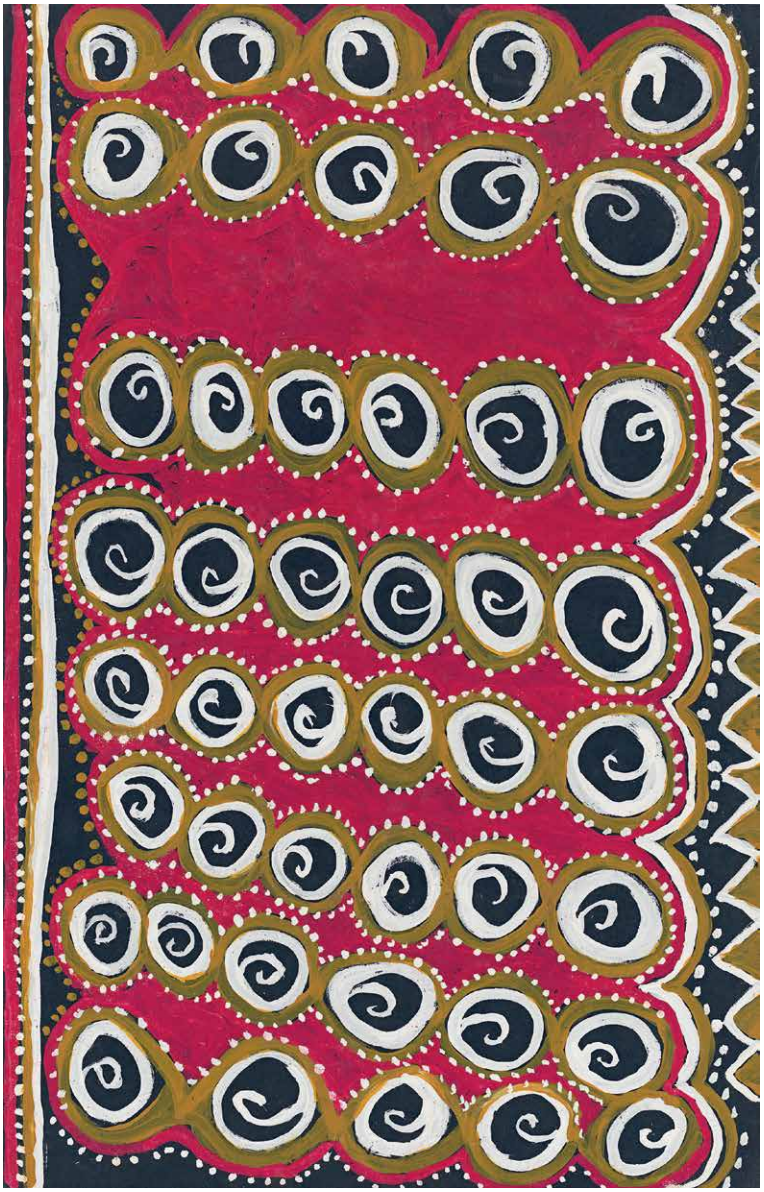

Figure 11.34. Wayikola of Bangwis village. Nassa shells (*yas*), 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.7 × 58.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.450.

The painting in Figure 11.34 is the only one I recorded that had 'nassa' cowry shells (*yas*) as its subject. These small white shells derive from the coast around the mouth of the Sepik and are traded along the river far into the interior. Traditionally Kwoma obtained these shells from neighbouring river peoples, principally the Manambu, who obtained them in turn from groups lower down the Sepik closer to the coast. Following the termination of warfare in this region Kwoma now also obtain nassa shells from the north coast via intermediaries in the Torricelli Mountains (see also Gaffney et al. 2019). Like their riverine neighbours, Kwoma use nassa shells and other cowries to make both wealth objects used in inter-clan exchanges and personal decorations (Figures 10.14, 11.35-11.36).

Figure 11.35. Hanging shell valuables (*ya*) of different kinds from a horizontal beam during a death payment at Bangwis village, 1982. The shell valuables (*ya*) are made from hundreds of nassa cowries stitched to flat fibre bases (Bowden 1988). When a death payment is made the valuables are suspended from a beam where the public can inspect and count them. The large women's net bags hanging from the end of the same beam, and the clay pots underneath it, form part the payment.

Figure 11.36. The woman named Korowenja of Brugnowi village on the Sepik (Iatmul language group) wearing examples of her community's traditional women's ceremonial attire, 1982. Several of the ornaments incorporate hundreds of nassa shells. These include the lime gourd she is carrying under her arm and the lime stick she is holding in her right hand.

Yatiikapa of Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis village

(For a photograph of this man and a brief biography see Chapter 10.)

Figure 11.37. Yatiikapa of Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis village. *Gwiyibi* bat in flight, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101.0 × 72.0 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.466.

The small bat depicted in this painting (Figure 11.37) is shown twice: once in the upper half of the design and once in the lower. Its torso is depicted in the form of black pointed ovals with white dashes running down their centres; its outstretched wings are represented by the adjacent triangular forms in yellow. Its mouth is shown in the form of 'smiling mouth' motifs at both the top and bottom of the design, to which rows of 'teeth' have been added.

Figure 11.38. Yatiikapa of Yanggaraka clan, Bangwis village. Design termed *wakatowa*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101.0 × 72.0 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.464.

This painting (Figure 11.38) is based on a design termed *wakatowa*. Kwoma say the design derives from the form of 'canoe shields' made by neighbouring peoples on the Sepik (Figure 11.39). These shields were attached to the fronts of the large war canoes in which men in river villages went into battle. The term 'shield' is potentially misleading. These artefacts are made of sago spathes and other flimsy materials which in armed conflict would have provided no protection from an enemy's spears or arrows. But the carvings attached to them depict the faces of spirits that men say accompanied warriors into battle and helped protect them in emergencies by supernatural means, such as by deflecting weapons away from them. In this painting the 'face' (*misoma*) on one of these shields is shown twice, one in the upper half and once in the lower half of the design. The upturned corners of the two faces represent the outer extensions of the shields. Canoe shields are fringed with dark cassowary feathers. Cassowaries, and cassowary feathers, throughout this region are symbols of physical strength and military might.

Figure 11.39. A canoe 'shield' displayed hanging from a post at Brugnowi village on the Sepik (Iatmul language group) with the man named Vi standing beside it for scale, 1983. (This shield is also illustrated, in colour, in Beran and Craig 2005:98.)

Meyimbor of Hipo clan, Bangwis village

(For a photograph and biography of this man see Chapter 10.)

Figure 11.40. Meyimbor of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. Waterlily flowers (*ukuba she*), 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.7 × 58.6 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.482.

Figure 11.41. Meyimbor of Hipo clan, Bangwis village. Waterlily flowers (*ukuba she*) shown radiating out from the plant's underwater stem, 1973. Gouache on paper, 91.7 × 58.6 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.499.

Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis village

(For a photograph and biography of this man see Chapter 10.)

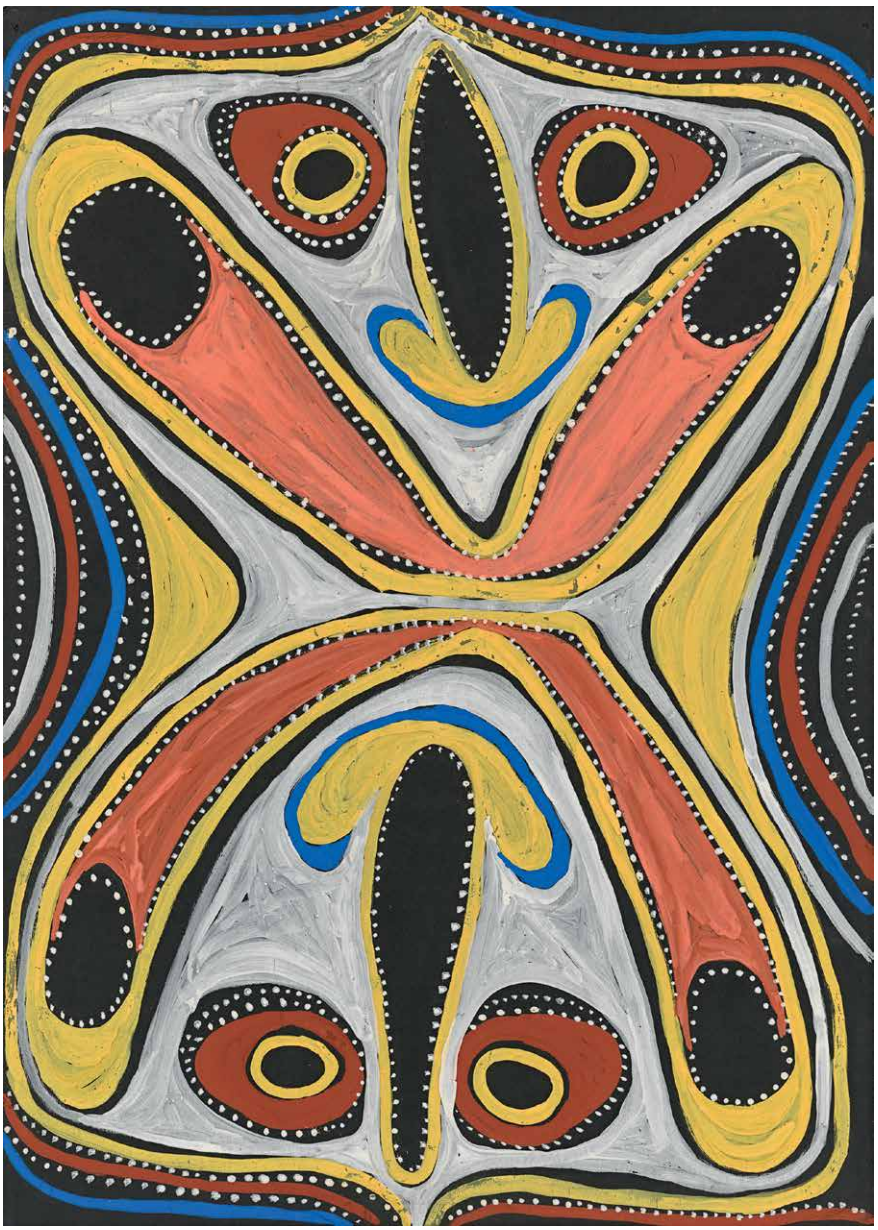

Figure 11.42. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis village. Two representations of the 'face' (*misoma*) of a long-legged water-walking insect termed *arokojawiyogo*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101.0 × 72.0 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.477.

For another representation of the same insect, by a different artist, see Figure 11.23.

Figure 11.43. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis village. Two representations of a type of edible larva termed *me poko ow*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101.0 × 72.0 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.445.

The fat-rich larvae depicted in Figure 11.43 are dug out of rotting forest vines and tree trunks and are prized as a food.

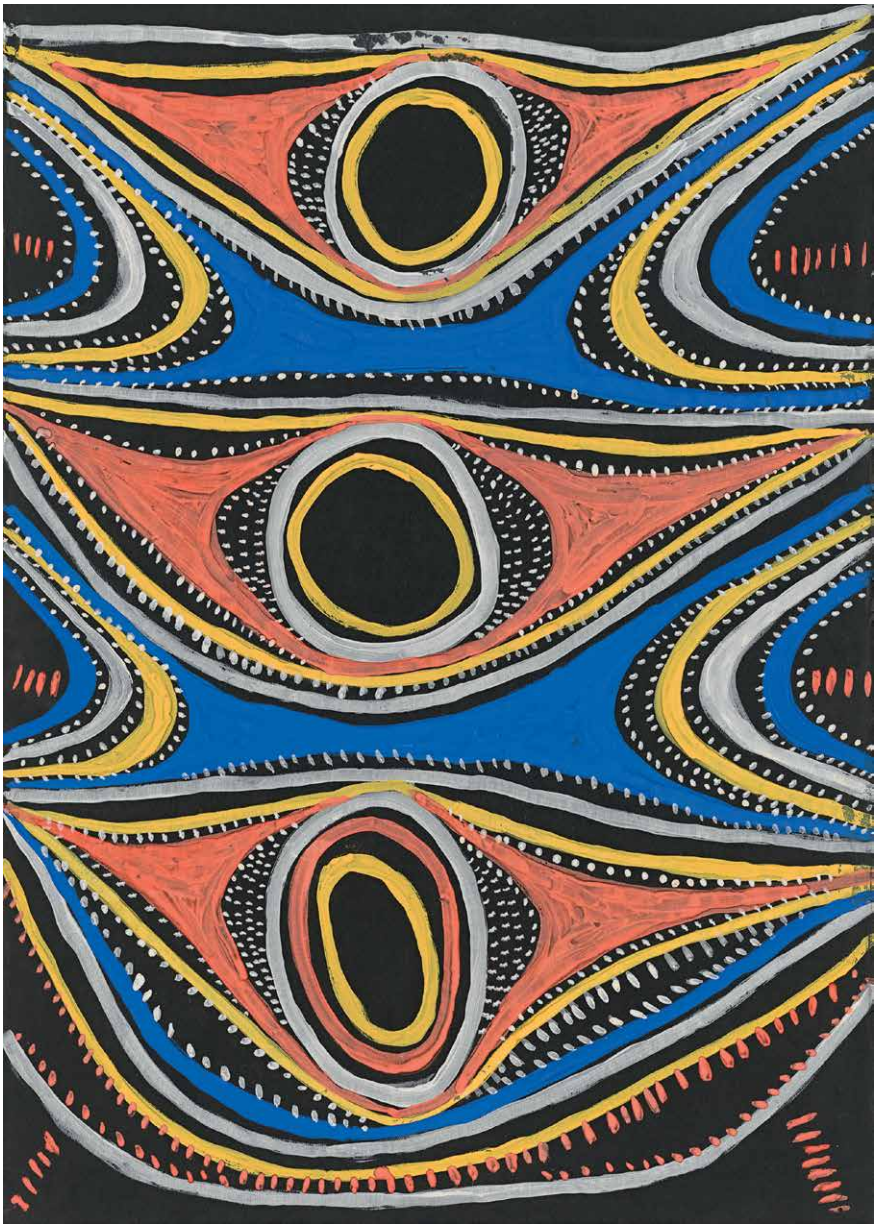

Figure 11.44. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis village. The green parrot termed *apojin*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101.0 × 72.0 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.476.

In Figure 11.44 the bird's torso and outstretched wings are depicted three times in images arranged in a column down the long axis of the design.

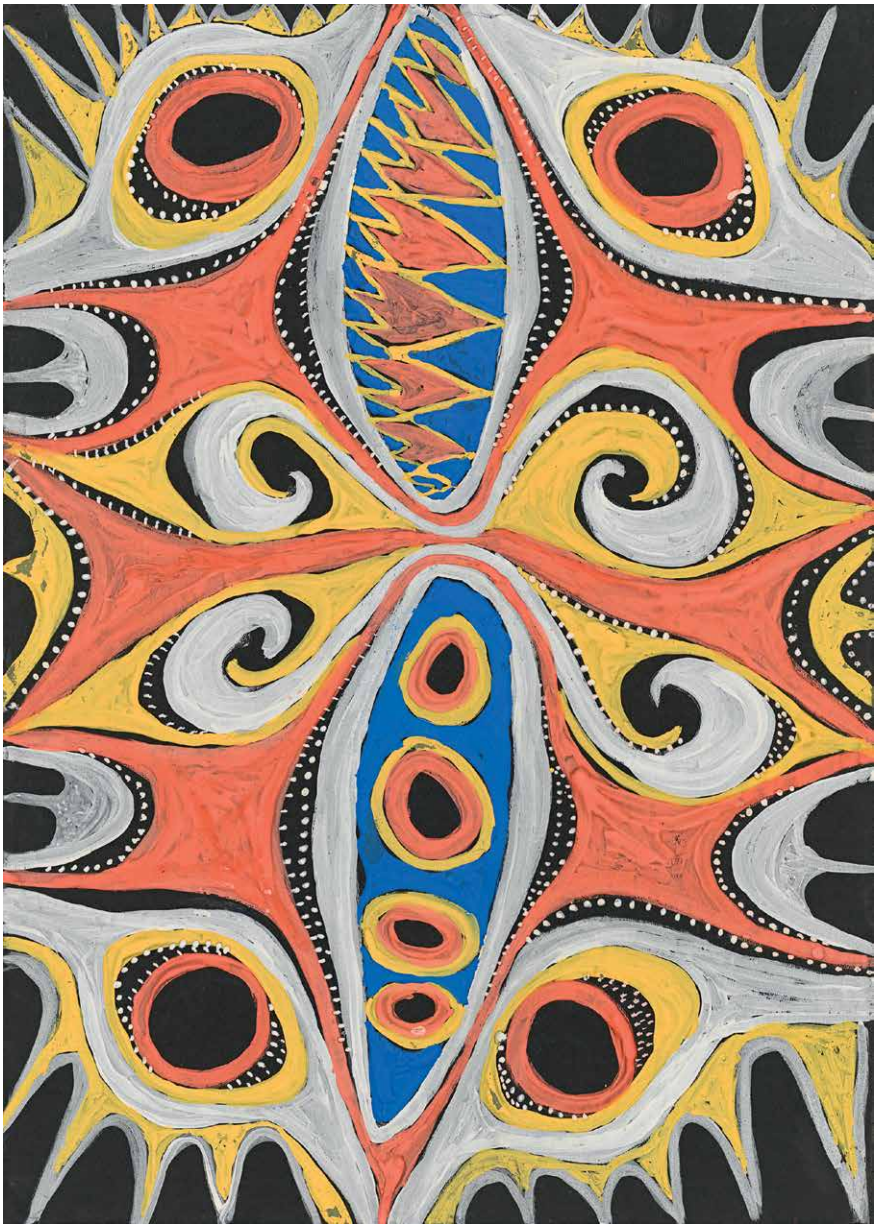

Figure 11.45. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis village. The ground-dwelling spider termed *isagwa*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 100.8 × 71.9 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.480.

In this painting (Figure 11.45) the spider is represented twice: once in the upper half and once in the lower half of the design. The blue pointed ovals outlined in white depict its fat-filled abdomen, traditionally a highly valued food. The black roundels are its 'eyes'. The white hook forms in the centre of the design are its 'teeth'. The same animal is depicted on the clay pot shown in Figure 2.13. This pot was made in pre-European times by the artist's paternal grandfather named Meer'ow.

Figure 11.46. Wachongg of Nggiley clan, Bangwis village. Dream after the sermon: Joseph's multicoloured cloak, 1973. Gouache on paper, 101.0 × 72.0 cm. National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), cat. 2001.446.

This painting (Figure 11.46) is based on a dream the artist had after hearing a sermon by the Seventh Day Adventist pastor from New Ireland then stationed in his village (see Bowden 1983a:55). The sermon was about the Old Testament figure of Joseph and his richly decorated cloak. In his dream the artist saw the cloak. This painting, he said, was his best attempt to reproduce its many colours.

References

Abramson, J. 1976. Style change in an Upper Sepik contact situation. In *Ethnic and tourist arts: cultural expressions from the fourth world* (ed.) N. Graburn, 249-65. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Abramson, J. 2000. *Art in non-literate societies: structural approaches and implications for socio-cultural and system theories*. Kalamazoo: Western Michigan Univ./ New Issues Press.

Adam, L. 1950. In memoriam: Felix Speiser. *Oceania* **21**, 66-72.

Adam, L. 1963. *Primitive Art*. London: Cassell.

Agoston, G. 1979. *Colour theory and its application in art and design*. New York: Springer.

Anderson, R. 1989. *Art in small-scale societies*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Anderson, R. 1990. *Calliope's sisters: a comparative study of philosophies of art*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Appiah, K. 1996. Why Africa? Why art? In *Africa: the art of a continent* (ed.) T. Phillips, 21-6. Munich/New York: Prestel.

Baines, J. 1996. Religion, general. In *The dictionary of art* (ed.) J. Turner **9**, 791-92. London: Macmillan.

Bamberger, J. 1974. The myth of matriarchy: why men rule in primitive society. In *Woman, culture and society* (eds) M. Rosaldo & L. Lamphere, 263-80. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Banks, M. & H. Morphy (eds) 1997. *Rethinking visual anthropology*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Barrow, T. 1978. *Maori art of New Zealand*. Paris: A.H. and A.W. Reed and The Unesco Press.

Bateson, G. 1958. *Naven*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Baxandall, M. 1988. *Painting and experience in fifteenth century Italy: a primer in the social history of pictorial style*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Behrmann, W. 1922. *Im Stromgebiet des Sepik: einer Deutsche Forschungsreise in Neuguinea*. Berlin: A. Scherl.

Behrmann, W. 1950-51. Die Versammlungshäuser (Kulthäuser) am Sepik in Neuguinea. *Die Erde* **3-4**, 305-27.

Bell, J. 1996. Perspective. In *The dictionary of art* (ed.) J. Turner **24**, 485-95. London: Macmillan.

Beran, H. & B. Craig (eds) 2005. *Shields of Melanesia*. Adelaide: Crawford House.
Berenson, B. 1959. *The Italian painters of the Renaissance*. London: Phaidon.
Berlin, B. & P. Kay. 1969. *Basic colour terms: their universality and evolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Billings, D.K. 2015. Style in New Ireland art and culture: grasping the native's point of view. *Oceania* **85**, 137-164.
Blocker, H. 1994. *The aesthetics of primitive art*. Lanham, Md: University Press of America.
Blombery, A. & T. Rodd. 1982. *Palms: an informative, practical guide to palms of the world: their cultivation, care and landscape use*. Melbourne: Angus and Robertson.
Boas, F. 1955. *Primitive art*. New York: Dover Publications.
Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction: a social critique of the judgment of taste* (trans. R. Nice). London and New York: Routledge.
Bowden, R. 1982. Lévi-Strauss in the Sepik: a Kwoma myth of the origin of marriage. *Oceania* **52**, 294-302.
Bowden, R. 1983a. *Yena: art and ceremony in a Sepik society*. Oxford: Pitt Rivers Museum.
Bowden, R. 1983b. Kwoma terminology and marriage alliance: the 'Omaha' problem revisited. *Man* (N.S.) **18**, 745-65.
Bowden, R. 1987. Sorcery, illness and social control in Kwoma society. In *Sorcerer and witch in Melanesia* (ed.) M. Stephen, 183-208. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
Bowden, R. 1988. Kwoma death payments and alliance theory. *Ethnology* **27**, 271-90.
Bowden, R. 1991. Historical ethnography or conjectural history? A critical analysis of *Sepik River societies* by Deborah B. Gewertz. *Oceania* **61**, 218-35.
Bowden, R. 1997. *A dictionary of Kwoma: a Papuan language of north-east New Guinea*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics (Series C, No. 134).
Bowden, R. 1999. What is wrong with an art forgery? An anthropological perspective. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* **57**, 333-43.
Bowden, R. 2004. A critique of Alfred Gell on art and agency. *Oceania* **74**, 309-24.
Bowden, R. 2006a. *Creative spirits: bark painting in the Washkuk Hills of north New Guinea*. Melbourne: Oceanic Art Pty Ltd.
Bowden, R. 2006b. Is 'art' a universal category? Some implications for museums. *Pacific Arts (N.S.)* **2**, 36-43.
Bowden, R. 2014. Review of *Distributed objects: meaning and mattering after Alfred Gell* (eds) Chua, L. & M. Elliot. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* **20**, 584-585.
Bowden, R. 2022. *Art and Creativity in a New Guineas society: the Kwoma in cross-cultural perspective*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books.
Bowden, R. 2023a. *The Yalaku: history and warfare in the middle Sepik*. Canon Pyon: Sean Kingston Publishing.
Bowden, R. 2023b. Representation and misrepresentation in ethnographic film: the case of *Cannibal tours*. *Journal of the Oceanic Art Society* **23**/3, 2-5 (Pt. 1); **23**/4, 2-5 (Pt. 2).
Broude, N. & M.D. Garrard. 1982. *Feminism and art history: questioning the litany*. New York: Harper and Row.
Bryson, N. 1986. The fluctuations of desire. *The Times Literary Supplement*, Nov. 28, 1351.
Budd, M. 1997. Wittgenstein, Ludwig. In *A companion to aesthetics* (ed.) D.E. Cooper, 444-47. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
Bühler, A. 1960. *Kunststile am Sepik: Führer durch das Museum für Völkerkunde und Schweiz.* Basel: Museum für Völkerkunde.

Butterfield, H. 1958. *The origins of modern science, 1300-1800*. London: G. Bell and Sons.
Caruana, W. 1993. *Aboriginal art*. Thames and Hudson.
Chari, V.K. 1998. Indian theories of interpretation. In *Encyclopaedia of aesthetics* (ed.) M. Kelly **2**, 490-93. New York: Oxford University Press.
Clark, A. & N. Thomas (eds) 2017. *Style and meaning: essays on the anthropology of art, Anthony Forge*. Leiden: Sidestone Press.
Clifford, J. 1988. *The predicament of culture: twentieth century ethnography, literature and art.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Clifford, J. & G. Marcus (eds) 1986. *Writing culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Clottes, J. 2006. Rock art today. *Conservation: The Getty Conservation Institute Newsletter* **21**/3, 4-9.
Cochrane, S. 2023. Recollections: Australian connections, collaborations, and collections in the Sepik Region of Papua New Guinea, 1960s-1970s. *Pacific Arts* **23**, 103-24.
Conkey, M. & C. Hastorf (eds) 1990. *The uses of style in archaeology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Coote, J. & A. Shelton (eds) 1992. *Anthropology, art and aesthetics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Craig, B. 1995. Arrow designs in northern and central New Guinea and the lapita connection. In *Pacific material culture: essays in honour of Dr. Simon Kooijman on the occasion of his 80th birthday* (eds) D. Smidt, P. ter Keurs & A. Trouwborst, 237-59. Leiden: Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde.
Craig, B. 1996a. Sepik. In *The dictionary of art* (ed.) J. Turner **24**, 65-73. London: Macmillan.
Craig, B. 1996b. *Samting bilong tumbuna: the collection, documentation and preservation of the material cultural heritage of Papua New Guinea*. Doctoral thesis, Department of Visual Arts, Flinders University of South Australia.
Craig, B. 2007. Review of Ross Bowden *Creative Spirits*. *Oceania* 77, 376-78.
Craig, B. & C. Roberts. 2018. Symmetry in arrow designs, songs and legends of central New Guinea and the upper Sepik. *http://www.uscngp.com/papers*.
D'Abrera, B. 1971. *Butterflies of the Australian region*. Melbourne: Lansdowne Press.
Davis, W. 1990. Style and history in art history. In *The uses of style in archaeology* (eds) M. Conkey & C. Hastorf, 18-31. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
De Boer, W. 1990. Interaction, imitation, and communication as expressed in style: the Ucayali experience. In *The uses of style in archaeology* (eds) M. Conkey & C. Hastorf, 82-104. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Dennett, Helen. 1975. *Mak bilong Sepik*. Wewak: Wirui Press.
Douven, I. 1999. Style and supervenience. *The British Journal of Aesthetics* **39**, 255-62.
Dumézil, G. 1988. *Mitra-Varuna: an essay on two Indo-European representations of sovereignty* (trans. D. Coltman). New York: Zone Books.
Dutton, D. (ed.) 1983a. *The forger's art: forgery and the philosophy of art*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Dutton, D. 1983b. Artistic crimes. In *The forger's art: forgery and the philosophy of art* (ed.) D. Dutton, 172-87. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Earle, T. 1990. Style and iconography as legitimation in complex chiefdoms. In *The uses of style in archaeology* (eds) M. Conkey & C. Hastorf, 73-81. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Elkin, A.P. 1935. Review of G.A. Reichard *Melanesian Design*. *Oceania* **5**, 495-6.
Elkins, J. 1996. Style. In *The dictionary of art* (ed.) J. Turner **29**, 876-83. London: Macmillan.
Fernandez, J. 1965. Symbolic consensus in a reformative cult. *American Anthropologist* **67**, 902-29.
Firth, R. 1936. *Art and life in New Guinea*. London: The Studio Limited.
Firth, R. 1975. *Symbols: public and private*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
Firth, R. 1992. Art and anthropology. In *Anthropology, art and aesthetics* (eds) J. Coote & A. Shelton, 15-39. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Fischer, John. 1961. Art styles as cultural cognitive maps. *American Anthropologist* **63**, 79-93.
Forge, A. 1966. Art and environment in the Sepik. *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute for 1965*, 23-31.
Forge, A. 1967. The Abelam artist. In *Social organization: essays presented to Raymond Firth* (ed.) M. Freedman, 65-84. London: Frank Cass.
Forge, A. 1970. Learning to see in New Guinea. In *Socialisation: an anthropological approach* (ed.) P. Mayer, 269-91. London: Tavistock.
Forge, A. (ed.) 1973a. *Primitive art and society*. London, New York: Oxford University Press.
Forge, A. 1973b. Style and meaning in Sepik art. In *Primitive art and society* (ed.) A. Forge, 169-92. London, New York: Oxford University Press.
Forge, A. 1979. The problem of meaning in art. In *Exploring the visual art of Oceania* (ed.) S. Mead, 278-86. Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii.
Forge, A. 2017. Notes on Eastern Abelam designs painted on paper, New Guinea. In *Style and meaning: essays on the anthropology of art, Anthony Forge* (eds) A. Clark & N. Thomas, 37-41. Leiden: Sidestone Press.
Fraser, D. 1966. The heraldic woman: a study in diffusion. In *The many faces of primitive art: a critical anthology* (ed.) D. Fraser, 36-99. Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice-Hall.
Gaffney, D., G. Summerhayes, K. Szabo & B. Koppel 2019. The emergence of shell valuable exchange in the New Guinea Highlands. *American Anthropologist* **121**, 30-47.
Gamboni, D. 2001. World heritage: shield or target? *Conservation: The Getty Conservation Institute Newsletter* **16**/2, 5-11.
Gell, A. 1998. *Art and agency: an anthropological theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Gewertz, D. 1983. *Sepik river societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Gombrich, E. 1968. *Art and illusion: a study in the psychology of pictorial representation*. London: Phaidon Press.
Gombrich, E. 1994. *Ideals and idols: essays on values in history and in art*. London: Phaidon Press.
Gombrich. E. 1996a. An autobiographical sketch. In *The essential Gombrich: selected writings on art and criticism* (ed.) R. Woodfield, 21-36. London: Phaidon Press.
Gombrich. E. 1996b. The visual image: its place in communication. In *The essential Gombrich: selected writings on art and criticism* (ed.) R. Woodfield, 41-64. London: Phaidon Press.
Gombrich. E. 1996c. Approaches to the history of art: three points for discussion. In *The essential Gombrich: selected writings on art and criticism* (ed.) R. Woodfield, 355-68. London: Phaidon Press.

Graburn, N. (ed.) 1976. *Ethnic and tourist arts: cultural expressions from the fourth world*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Greub, S. (ed.) 1992. *Art of northwest New Guinea. From Geelvink Bay, Humboldt Bay, and Lake Sentani*. New York: Rizzoli.

Guddemi, P. 1993. Mumukokolua: sago spathe painting among the Sawiyanö of Papua New Guinea. *Res* **23**, 67-82.

Guddemi, Phillip. 2011. Review of Ross Bowden *Creative Spirits*. *Pacific Arts* **11**/2: 46-7.

Guiart, J. 1963. *The arts of the South Pacific* (trans. A. Christie). New York: Golden Press.

Haberland, E. & M. Schuster. 1964. *Sepik: Kunst aus Neuguinea*. Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Völkerkunde.

Hardin, C. & L. Maffi (eds) 1997. *Colour categories in thought and language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hardin, C. & L. Maffi 2000. Colour categories: the docudrama. *American Anthropologist* **102**, 321.

Harrison, A. 1997. Style. In *A companion to aesthetics* (ed.) D. Cooper, 403-47. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Hauser-Schäublin, B. 1989. *Kulthäuser in Nordneuguinea*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.

Hauser-Schäublin, B. 2015. *Ceremonial houses of the Abelam, Papua New Guinea: architecture and ritual – a passage to the ancestors* (trans. N. Stephenson). Goolwa, SA.: Crawford House Publishing.

Hauser-Schäublin, B. 2022. Primeval skins: the rugged and the smooth surface. Cultural keynotes and accords in the Middle Sepik, Papua New Guinea. In P. Fortis & S. Küchler (eds) *Time and its object: a perspective from Amerindian and Melanesian societies on the temporality of images*, 87-109. London: Routledge.

Hein, H. 1990. The role of feminist aesthetic in feminist theory. In *Feminism and traditional aesthetics* (eds) P. Brand & C. Korsmeyer, 281-91.

Hodder, I. 1982. *Symbols in action: ethnoarchaeological studies of material culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hodder, I. 1990. Style as historical quality. In *The uses of style in archaeology* (eds) M. Conkey & C. Hastorf, 44-51. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Howes, D. 1990. Controlling textuality: a call for a return to the senses. *Anthropologica* **22**, 55-73.

Howes, D. 1991. Sensorial anthropology. In *The varieties of sensory experience: a sourcebook in the anthropology of the senses* (ed.) D. Howes, 167-91. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Hursthouse, R. 2000. Truth and representation. In *Philosophical aesthetics: an introduction* (ed.) O. Hanfling, 239-96. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers in association with the Open University.

Jones, D. 1984. *Palms in Australia*. Frenchs Forest, NSW.: Reed Books Pty Ltd.

Jones, M. (ed.) 1992. *Why fakes matter. Essays on problems of authenticity*. London: The Trustees of the British Museum.

Jones, M., P. Craddock & N. Barker (eds) 1990. *Fake? The art of deception*. London: The Trustees of the British Museum.

Kaeppler, A. 1989. Art and aesthetics. In *Developments in Polynesian ethnology* (eds) A. Howard & R. Borofsky, 211-40. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Kahn, A. 2023. *Imperial museum dynasties in Europe: papal ethnographic collections and material culture*. Singapore: Springer.

Kaufmann, C. 1979. Art and artists in the context of Kwoma society. In *Exploring the visual art of Oceania* (ed.) S. Mead, 310-34. Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii.
Kay, P., B. Berlin, L. Maffi & W. Merrifield. 1997. Colour naming across languages. In *Colour categories in thought and language* (eds) C. Hardin & L. Maffi, 21-56. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Kelm, H. 1966-68. *Kunst vom Sepik*. Berlin: Museum für Völkerkunde.
Kemp, M. 1990. *The science of art: optical themes in western art from Brunelleschi to Seurat*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Kitson, M. 1996. Claude (le) Lorrain. In *The Dictionary of art* (ed.) J. Turner **7**, 389-403. London: Macmillan.
Koch, G. 1968. *Kultur der Abelam: die Berliner 'Maprik'-Sammlung*. Berlin: Museum für Völkerkunde.
Kooyers, O. 1974. Washkuk grammar sketch. *Workpapers in Papua New Guinea Linguistics 6*. Ukarumpa: Papua New Guinea.
Kooyers, O., M. Kooyers & D. Bee. 1971. The phonemes of Washkuk (Kwoma). *Te Reo* **14**, 37-41.
Korn, S. 1978. The formal analysis of visual systems as exemplified by a study of Abelam (Papua New Guinea) paintings. In *Art in society: studies in style, culture and aesthetics* (eds) M. Greenhalgh & M. Megaw, 161-73. London: Duckworth.
Lang, B. (ed.) 1979. *The concept of style*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
Laycock, D. 1973. *Sepik languages: checklist and preliminary classification*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics (Series B, No. 25).
Lévi-Strauss, C. 1963. *Totemism* (trans. R. Needham). Boston: Beacon Press.
Lévi-Strauss, C. 1966. *The Savage Mind*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
Lewis, H. 2020. Review of Daniel Varisco *Culture Still Matters: Notes from the Field*. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)* **26**, 469-70.
May, P. & M. Tuckson. 1982. *The traditional pottery of Papua New Guinea*. Sydney: Bay Books.
Mead, M. 1950. *Sex and temperament in three primitive societies*. New York: New American Library.
Mead, M. 1963. The bark paintings of the Mountain Arapesh of New Guinea. In *Technique and personality in primitive art* (eds) M. Mead, J. Bird & H. Himmelheber, 7-43. New York: The Museum of Primitive Art.
Mead, M. 1972. *Blackberry winter: my early years*. New York: William Morrow and Company.
Melk-Koch, M. 2002. Melanesian art or just stones and junk? Richard Thurnwald and the question of art in Melanesia. *Pacific Arts* **21** & **22**, 53-68.
Mihalic, F. 1971. *The Jacaranda dictionary and grammar of Melanesian Pidgin*. Milton, Qld: The Jacaranda Press.
Miller, D. 1993. *Material culture and mass consumption*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
Moran, D. 1998. Mediaeval Platonism. In *Routledge encyclopaedia of philosophy* (ed.) E. Craig **7**, 431-439. London and New York: Routledge.
Munn, N. 1973. *Walbiri iconography: graphic representation and cultural symbolism in a central Australian society*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
Münzel, M. (ed.) 1987. *Neuguinea: Nutzug und Deutung der Umwelt*. Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Völkerkunde.

Newton, D. 1971. *Crocodile and cassowary*. New York: The Museum of Primitive Art.
Nicolas, A. (ed.) 2000. *Art Papou: Austronésiens et Papous de Nouvelle-Guinée*. Marseilles: Musées de Marseille – Réunion des Musées Nationaux.
Nozawa, Michiyo. 2006. *Mende Triglot Dictionary: Mende, English, Tok Pisin*. Ukarumpa: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
Papua New Guinea (Independent State of) 1976. *National Cultural Property (Preservation) Act*. Port Moresby: Papua New Guinea.
Papua New Guinea National Government 2014. *2011 National Population & Housing Census: Momase region*. Port Moresby: National Statistical Office.
Plato. 1987. *The Republic* (trans. D. Lee). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
Podro, M. 1987. Depiction and the golden calf. In *Philosophy and the visual arts: seeing and abstracting* (ed.) A. Harrison, 3-22. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company.
Price, S. 1989. *Primitive art in civilised places*. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press.
Rodseth, L. 2018. Hegemonic concepts of culture: the checkered history of dark anthropology. *American Anthropologist* **120**, 398-411.
Rowse, T. 2000. Hindmarsh Revisited: review article. *Oceania* **70**, 252-62.
Ruddle K., D. Johnson, P. Townsend & J. Rees 1978. *Palm sago: a tropical starch from marginal lands*. Canberra: Australian University Press.
Rutgers, A. 1970. *Birds of New Guinea. Illustrations from the lithographs of John Gould*. London: Methuen.
Ryan, P. (ed.) 1972. *Encyclopaedia of Papua New Guinea*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
Sackett, J. 1990. Style and ethnicity in archaeology: the case for isochrestism. In *The uses of style in archaeology* (eds) M. Conkey & C. Hastorf, 32-43. Cambridge: University Press.
Schapiro, M. 1953. Style. In *Anthropology today: an encyclopaedic inventory* (ed.) A. Kroeber, 287-312. Chicago: University Press.
Schefold, R. 1966. *Versuch einer Stilanalyse der Aufhängehaken vom Mittleren Sepik in Neu-Guinea*. Basel: Pharos-Verlag Hansrudolf Schwabe AG.
Schindlbeck, M. (ed.) 2015. *Unterwegs in der Südsee: Adolf Roesicke und seine Fahrten auf dem Sepik in Neuguinea*. Berlin: Nicolai.
Schmitz, C. 1956. Sepik provinces and style elements: a study in method. *Mankind* **5**/3, 107-16.
Schuster, M. 1969. *Die Maler vom May River*. *Palette*, no. 33. Basel: Sandoz AG.
Sewell, B. 1999. *The Evening Standard*, 'Hot Tickets' colour supplement, Dec. 3-9, 44.
Silver, H. 1979. Ethnoart. *Annual Reviews in Anthropology* **8**, 267-307.
Smith, B. 1989. *European vision and the South Pacific*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
Smith, B. 1992. *Imagining the Pacific: in the wake of the Cook voyages*. Melbourne: University Press at the Miegunyah Press.
Stanlaw, J. 1997. Two observations on culture contact and the Japanese colour nomenclature system. In *Colour categories in thought and language* (eds) C. Hardin & L. Maffi, 240-60. Cambridge: University Press.
Sutton, P. (ed.) 1988. *Dreamings: the art of Aboriginal Australia*. New York: George Braziller Publishers.

Swadling, P., B. Hauser-Schäublin, P. Gorecki & F. Tiesler 1988. *The Sepik-Ramu: an introduction*. Boroko: Papua New Guinea National Museum.

Thomas, N. 1997. Collectivity and nationality in the anthropology of art. In *Rethinking visual anthropology* (eds) M. Banks & H. Morphy, 265-75. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Turner, V. 1967. *The forest of symbols: aspects of Ndembu ritual*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Vasari, G. 1987. *The lives of the artists* (trans. G. Bull). Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Washburn, D. 1999. Perceptual anthropology: the cultural salience of symmetry. *American Anthropologist* **101**, 547-62.

Washburn, D. 2002. Review of J. Abramson *Art in non-literate societies. Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)* **8**, 188-9.

Washburn, D. & D. Crowe 1988. *Symmetries of culture: theory and practice of plane pattern analysis*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Whiting, J. 1941. *Becoming a Kwoma: teaching and learning in a New Guinea tribe*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Whiting, J. 1970. *Kwoma journal*. Hraflex Book #0J13-001. New Haven: Human Relations Area Files.

Whiting, J. & S. Reed 1938-39. Report on field work in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea. *Oceania* **9**, 170-216.

Wierzbicka, A. 2008. Why there are no 'colour universals' in language and thought. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)* **14**, 407-25.

Wiessner, P. 1983. Style and social information in Kalahari San projectile points. *American Antiquity* **48**, 253-276.

Wiessner, P. 1990. Is there a unity to style? In *The uses of style in archaeology* (eds) M. Conkey & C. Hastorf, 105-12. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Witkowski, S. and C. Brown 1978. Lexical universals. In *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7, 427-51.

Wollheim, R. 2003. Art. In *Grove Art Online: https://doi-org.bmus-ezproxy.koha-ptfs.co.uk/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T004285*

Woodfield, R. 1997. Representation. In *A companion to aesthetics* (ed.) D. Cooper, 369-72. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Wronska-Friend, M. 2023. Shell rings of power: gender relations in material culture production on the Aitape Islands, Papua New Guinea. *Pacific Arts* **23**/2, 4-24.

Wurm, S. & S. Hattori (eds) 1981. *Language atlas of the Pacific area*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics (Series C, No. 66).

INDEX

Abelam art, 76, 100-1, 112n38, 229
Abelam language group, 27, 27n5
Abelam men's houses, 27, 27n5, 28, 32
Aboriginal (Australian) art, 33-4, 34n9, 125
Abramson, J., 75n23, 101n33
Adam, L., 75n23, 77
adzes, 29, 31, 51-5, 51n15, 108, 110, 117, 231, 247
aesthetic values, Kwoma, 103-17; Western, 112, 112n39, 113-14, 113n40; *see also* Abelam art; creativity in art
age-grade ceremonies, 239; Handiipiya, 85; Nal, 239, 239n54
Agoston, G., 59
Aibom village, 161
Akis (modern PNG artist), 138, 141
Amachey clan (Melawei village), 39, 45, 93, 124, 219, 220, 222, 224
Ambunti Local Government Council, 197
Ambunti region, 25
Ambunti township, 24, 25, 26, 48, 130, 133, 137, 141, 193, 229, 242
Ambunti Post Office mural, 134, 136-7
Ambunyiki (man, Bangwis village), 43, 97, 98, 99, 196-211; biography, 197; portrait, 196
Anderson, R., 75n23, 116, 119
animals (of the forest), 239-41
anonymity (of artist). *See* artists, anonymity culturally
Apakwinya (man, Bangwis village), 250-7; biography, 251; portrait, 250
Appiah, K., 116
arokomaka spirits, 128-9, 137, 150, 208, 232-3, 235; depicted on slit-gongs, 234; *see also* bark painting, subjects; paintings on paper
art, criteria for judging quality. *See* aesthetic values
art, concept of, Kwoma, 116-17, 117n42; Kwoma lack of term for, 116-17
art, concept of, modern Western, 116-17
art, Kwoma, 23-5, 28-9, 37, 48, 227-9; innovations in, 124-38, 221; materials used, 29n6; methods of display, 28-9, 31-2; motifs borrowed from neighbouring river peoples, 205; sculpture, 37, 128, 129, 133; style, 37, 73-89; teaching, 119-23; *see also* bark painting, subjects; paintings on paper
art, Sepik River (non-Kwoma), 23-4, 73
art styles, 37, 73-89; two senses of, 76-7
artists, 23, 39, 41, 54-5; 227-9; abilities of (as understood by Kwoma), 111-12; anonymity culturally, 114-16; terms for, 29, 29n6, 54-5
artists, individual. *See* Ambunyiki; Apakwinya; Manal Kapay; Manggwiyow; Meer'ow; Meyimbor; Mburunggay; Nayikiya; Pandiiriikumb;

Wachongg; Wakarap; Wayikola; Wulasaka; Yatiikapa
artists, non-Kwoma (Sepik), 23-4, 112n39; *see also* Abelam art
artists, Western notion of, 112-16, 113n40
Baines, J., 106n37
Bangwis village, 7, 22, 25-7, 27n4, 29, 31, 34, 39, 42, 45, 47, 49, 88, 102-5, 110, 112, 125, 127, 130, 139, 141, 163, 165, 167, 183, 197, 213, 223, 227, 231, 234, 251, 258, 262, 265; *see also* Kwoma social organisation; villages
bark painting, 23-4, 28-9; 31-2, 33-5; a man's art form, 31; *see also* Abelam art; Iatmul art; Kambot art; Aboriginal (Australian) art
bark painting, changes in, 125-38
bark painting, collections, 34-5
bark painting, design elements, 65-71
bark painting, market for, 33-4
bark painting, materials used, 51-63, 125-6, 221, 233; *see also* pigments
bark painting, meaning of designs, 37, 91-117; contradictory views, 91-2, 96-100;
bark painting, method of display, 28-9
bark painting, multivocality of designs, 67, 69-71, 91-101
bark painting style, 37, 41, 73-89, 119-23, 151; figurative imagery, 37; 77-9, 131-7; modes of representation, 77-82, 78n25; non-figurative imagery, 37, 77-9, 145; perspective, 82; symmetry, 82-9
bark painting, subjects, 37-49, 70-1, 91-101, 126-38; *see also* paintings on paper
bark painting, subjects of particular barks, *arokomaka* (anthropomorphic) face, 137, 150, 180, 208, 232, 235; bat, 166; beetle, 176; bird, 122, 146, 186; *bodi* tree and fruit, 44, 112, 126, 152, 190; boulder, 66, 166, 184; butterfly, 41-2, 71, 158-9, 161, 168-9, 204-5; butterfly cocoon, 206-7; caterpillar, 188-9; centipede, 210-11, 248; ceremonial sculpture, 127-8; crocodile spirit, 220-1; fern, 43, 70, 87, 221; flying fox, 40, 42, 45, 71, 84, 92-3,106, 121, 124-5, 131, 142-5, 198-9, 222-3, 242; frog, 96-7; Iatmul design, 123, 160-2; insect, 45, 81, 118, 158-9, 169, 172-5, 177, 182, 205; insect larvae, 158, 202; lime container, 123; lizard, 41, 58-62, 131-3; millipede, 148-9, 170-1; moon, 45, 70; mythological figure, 134; parrot, 146; pumpkin, 87; python, 162-3; river stone, 78; sago grub, 68-9; sago-stealing spirit, 90,98, 100-1, 194-5; scorpion, 156-7; sculpture, 127; shooting star, 94, 97, 99, 178; snail, 154; spirit, 45, 80, 90, 100-1, 112, 118, 137, 194, 220, 224, 232; steer, 130; taro plant, 83, 214; *wakan* plant, 85; waterlily plant and flowers, 45, 122, 154, 216; wave (on river or lagoon), 101, 192, 200; woman in myth, 134; woman's stomach decoration, 46; *see also* paintings on paper
bark painting, teaching, 119-23
bark painting, term for, 66
bark painting, women's role in, 31-2
Basel Museum of Cultures, 35
basketry masks (Kwoma), 257
Bateson, G., 42n14, 133
bats, 167, 267; *see also* bark painting, subjects; paintings on paper
Baxandall, M., 119n43
Beale, M., 113
beauty, 46, 106n37
Bee, D., 9
Beglam village, 27
Behrmann, W., 23
Bell, J., 82
Beran, H., 269
Berlin, B., 58
betel nut, 23, 55, 60-1, 60n20, 67, 70, 189, 225, 229
betel pepper vine, 60n20
big man. *See* leadership
Billings, D., 75n23
bird of paradise, 41
bird of paradise plumes, 262, 266
birds, 41, 187, 274; *see also* bark painting, subjects; paintings on paper

Bishop Museum (Hawaii), 35
Bixa orellana tree, 56, 56n17
Blocker, H., 75n23, 117
Blombery, A., 51
Boas, F., 65, 79-81, 79n26, 82n27
bodi tree, 42, 42n14; 44, 67, 126, 152, 153, 190, 191, 243, 244; myth of, 153; varieties, 112; *see also* bark painting, subjects; paintings on paper
body heat (relative), men's 239; women's 239
bone daggers, 179
bones, human, 46, 133, 179, 251; *see also* Kwoma culture, death practices
Botero, F., 115-16
boulders. S*ee* bark painting, subjects
Bourdieu, P., 76
Bowden, R., 23-6, 28, 31, 31n7, 34, 37, 39, 39n11, 41, 42n14, 43, 46, 48, 49, 55, 62, 75, 75n23, 76, 85, 86n28, 103-4, 105n36, 106n37, 110-11, 112n39, 114, 116, 116n41, 117, 119, 119n43, 127, 138, 141, 149, 153, 155, 179, 197, 221, 224, 229, 231, 234, 238, 238n50, 238n52, 258, 265, 276
breadfruit tree, 41, 49, 57, 165
bridewealth payments, 143, 153, 231, 238; *see also* Kwoma social organisation, marriage practices
Broude, N., 113n40
Brown, C., 58n19
Brugnowi village (Iatmul language group), 33, 266, 269
Bryson, N., 113
Budd, M., 73
Buddha, sculpture of (Afghanistan), 105
Bühler, A., 73n21, 77, 134n46
Butterfield, H., 113n40
butterflies, 41-2, 159, 161, 169, 189; *see also* bark painting, subjects
butterfly cocoons, 161, 206-7; *see also* bark painting, subjects
butterfly-hinge motif (in art), 159
Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, *161*
cannibal spirits, 224-5
cannibalism (in myth), 45, 149
canoe shields (Sepik River), 268-9
canoes, 26, 155, 193, 268-9
Caruana, W., 33
carving. *See* sculpture
cassowaries, 41, 49, 107, 239-41, 268; in myth, 240-1
cassowary feathers, 268-9
caterpillars, 189; *see also* bark painting, subjects
census (national, Papua New Guinea), 27
centipedes, 210-11, 248; *see also* bark painting, subjects; paintings on paper
ceremonial houses. *See*, men's houses
ceremonies, 31n7; *see also* age-grade ceremonies; Minja; Nokwi; Yena
Chambri Lakes, 161
change (in Kwoma art). *See* bark painting, changes in
Chari, V., 67
chicken (domestic fowl), 46, 163; myth of origin, 132-3
chief, 31; *see also* leadership
clans. *See* Kwoma social organisation
Clark, A., 227n47
Claude Lorrain, 113
clay pots. *See* pottery
Clifford, J., 91
Clottes, J., 104n34
Cochrane, S., 227n47
coconut palm, 28, 49, 60-2, 67, 70, 95, 223
colour classification, 55-6, 58-60; *see also* pigments
Conkey, M., 75n23
conservation. *See* men's houses (Kwoma); National Cultural Property (Preservation) Act
Craig, B., 23, 27, 73, 75n23, 77, 88n29, 105, 269
creativity in art, Kwoma beliefs, 111-16; Western views, 112-14, 112n39, 113n40; *see also* aesthetic values
crocodiles, 41, 46, 122, 220-1; *see also* bark painting, subjects
Crowe, D., 75n23, 82-3, 86-7

culture, 106, 106n37; origins of (as understood by Kwoma), 73, 73n22, 106-8, 110, 238-41; Western understandings, 106n37
D'Abrera, B., 159, 207
daggers. *See* bone daggers
Davis, W., 73, 75
death beliefs and practices. *See* Kwoma culture
De Boer, W., 67
Dennett, H. 227n47
design. *See* art, Kwoma; bark painting, design elements
design elements. *See* bark painting, design elements
divorce, 143
Douven, I., 75n23
dreams. *See* Kwoma culture
Dumézil, G., 241n55
Dutton, D., 114
Earle, T., 73, 77
Egypt (ancient), 106n37, 113
Elkin, A. 75n23
Elkins, J., 73
Fernandez, J., 92n31
figurative imagery. *See* bark painting, style
Firth, R., 67, 116
Fischer, J., 75n23
fish, 49, 122-3, 132, 149, 155, 179, 193, 224-5, 233, 245-6, 250, 259; *see also* paintings on paper
fish eagle, 41
fishing, 193, 224-5, 250-1
flying foxes, 40, 42, 45, 54, 71, 84, 92, 93, 106, 121, 124-5, 131, 142-5, 163, 198, 199, 222-3, 242; *see also* bark painting, subjects; paintings on paper
foods, 48-9, 73, 147, 155, 195, 202, 215, 217, 239-41, 275
Forge, A., 27, 51, 100-1, 112n38, 227n47, 229
forgery, 114
Frankfurt Museum of World Cultures (Germany), 35, 134-5, 231
Fraser, D., 134n46
Gaffney, D., 264
Gamboni, D., 105
gardens, 55-6, 71, 85, 119, 147, 153, 155, 157, 167, 174, 241
Garrard, M., 113n40
Gell, A., 31, 75n23, 86n28
Germany (in Pacific), 26n3, 56n17
ghosts, 43, 104, 107-8, 110, 179, 225; *see also* Kwoma culture, death beliefs
gifts, 225; *see also* Kwoma social organisation, bridewealth payments; sacrifice
Gombrich, E., 75n23, 92n31, 130n44
Graburn, N., 34n9
grass skirts, 24, 25n1
Greub, S., 131
Guddemi, P., 33, 51
Guiart, J., 35
Haberland, E., 33, 35, 73n21, 105n36, 135, 177, 213-4, 216, 231
Hamikwa totemic division, 39, 41, 44, 49, 92, 112, 118, 134, 213; *see also* Kwoma social organisation, totemic divisions; totemism
Handiipiya initiation ritual. *See* age-grade ceremonies
Hanson, W., 134
Hardin, C., 58
Harrison, A., 73
Hastorf, C., 75n23
Hattori, S., 25n2
Hauser-Schäublin, B., 23, 27, 27n5, 75n23
heads (trophy), 24; *see also* skull racks
Hein, H., 113n40
Hipo clan, 39, 44, 81, 92, 128, 130, 134, 212-4, 216, 250-61, 270-1; *see also* Kwoma social organisation, clans
Hodder, I., 73, 75n23, 77
homicides. *See* Kwoma culture, warriors
Honggwama tribe, 26-7, 34-5, 39, 41, 48, 49, 213, 251; *see also* Kwoma social organisation, tribes
Howes, D., 119n43
Hursthouse, R., 78n25
Iatmul art, 27, 33, 123, 131, 133-5, 160-1, 205, 266, 269; *see also* canoe shields; women (Iatmul)

Iatmul language group, 27, 33, 42n14, 131, 133-5, 161, 266
Iatmul men's houses, 27
incest taboo. *See* Kwoma social organisation, marriage practices
India (classical), 106n37
information flow, 91-2, 92n30
innovation in art. *See* art (Kwoma), innovations in
insect larvae. *See* bark painting, subjects; paintings on paper
insects, 41-2, 45, 81, 118, 121, 158-9, 169, 172-7, 182, 202, 205, 207, 253, 255-6, 272; *see also* bark painting, subjects; paintings on paper
interpretations of paintings. *See* bark painting, meaning of designs
isochrestic model of style, 75-6
Iwam language group, 101, 101n33
Jones, D., 51, 223
Jones, M., 114
Julius Caesar (play), 95n32
Kaeppler, A., 116
Kahn, A., 47
Kambot art, 27-8
Kapay. *See* Manal Kapay
Kauage (modern PNG artist), 138, 141, 149
Kaufmann, C., 35, 51n15
Kaunga language group, 32, 42n14, 55, 85, 149, 224-5
Kay, P., 58-9
Kelm, H., 24, 27, 35, 51n15, 82n27, 134n46, 161, 205
keloids, 46-7, 137; *see also* bark painting, subjects
Kemp, M., 82, 113n40
Keram River, 27
Keram River language group, 27
Keram River men's houses, 27
Keyava totemic division, 39, 41, 49, 93, 121-2, 124, 142, 144, 154, 177, 220, 224; *see also* Kwoma social organisation, totemic divisions; totemism
Kirschbaum, F., 47
Kitson, M., 113, 113n40
knowledge (types), 119, 119n43
Koch, G., 33
Kooyers, M., 9
Kooyers, O., 9
Korn, S., 65, 76
Korowenja (woman, Brugnowi village), *266*
Kowariyasi tribe, 26-7, 35, 100, 122, 146
Kwanga language group, 25n2, 32
Kwaya dance, 240
Kwoma ceremonies. *See* age-grade ceremonies; Minja; Nawa; Nokwi; Yena
Kwoma clans. *See* Kwoma social organisation, clans
Kwoma culture, 24-7, 32n8, 193; attire (traditional), 24, 47; death beliefs, 43, 94-5, 95n32, 97-9, 104, 110, 236; death payments, 265; death practices, 179, 231, 265; dreams, 46, 111-2, 167, 276; origins of (in Kwoma belief), 106-8, 106n37, 110, 116-7; status (personal), 97-8, 149, 197, 231; swimming, 193; warriors, 94-5, 97-8, 231
Kwoma history, 26-7, 37, 104, 106, 110, 114, 117, 147, 225, 238
Kwoma language group, 24-5; dialect groups, 25, 25n2, 27
Kwoma men's houses. *See* men's houses (Kwoma)
Kwoma social organisation, clan names, 39, 39n11; clans, 37, 39, 39n11, 41; marriage practices, 153, 238, 238n52, 238n53; names of people, 39, 165; names of pets, 39; population, 27, 27n4; tribes, 26-7, 37; village meetings, 31-2, 197, 213, 231; village populations, 27; village totemic profiles, 49; *see also* totemic divisions; totemism; villages
lagoons, 43-5, 94-5, 107, 122, 155, 179, 193, 201, 211, 217, 236
Lang, B., 75n23
languages, Ambunti region, 25
La Trobe University, 7
larvae (insect). *See* bark painting, subjects; paintings on paper
Laycock, D., 9, 25n2, 27n4, 75
leadership, 31, 197

learning (to paint). *See* bark painting, teaching
Lely, Sir Peter, 113
Lévi-Strauss, C., 49, 95n32
Lewis, H., 73n22
lime container, 123, 160-1, 205
lizards, 41, 131; *see also* bark painting, subjects
Local Government Councils, 31, 105, 197
logocentric cultures, 119n43
Maffi, L., 58
magic, 85, 106, 108, 110, 143, 225, 238-40
Maio dialect group, 75-6; *see also* Mayo language group
Maio village, 25, 75-6
Manal Kapay (man, Bangwis village), 42, 48, 66, 68-70, 78-80, 79n26, 83, 87-8, 94-8, 100-1, 138, 182-95; biography, 183; portrait, 182
Manambu language group, 161
Manggwiyow (man, Bangwis village), 258-61; biography, 258; portrait, 258
Map of Ambunti area, 25
Marak (man, Washkuk village), 240
Marcus, G., 91
marriage practices. *See* Kwoma social organisation, marriage practices
Masembeyakapa (man, in myth), 46, 96, 237-41
May, P., 161
Mayo language group, 25, 75-6
Mbanggwatapa clan, 39, 42, 48, 66, 78, 83, 87, 94, 96, 101, 183-4, 186, 188, 190, 192, 194; *see also* Kwoma social organisation, clans
Mbapan (man, in myth), 149
Mburunggay (man, Melawei village), 45, 93, 124-5, 218-225; biography, 219; portrait, 218
McGuigan, Mrs J., 7, 47
Mead, M., 26, 51, 161
meanings of paintings. *See* bark painting, meaning of designs
meer tree, 41, 165
Meer'ow (man, Nggiley clan), 48, 165, 275
meetings (village). *See* Kwoma social organisation, village meetings
Melawei village, 25, 39, 49, 219; *see also* Kwoma social organisation, villages
Melk-Koch, M., 33
Meno village, 25, 27
men's houses (Kwoma), architecture, 22-3, 27-8, 103, 108; art in, 26-34; 36-8, 40-1, 45, 48-50, 62, 64, 72, 74, 77, 83-5, 90-1, 96, 100-2, 106-7, 109, 114-15, 126-9, 131, 131n45, 137, 151, 227-9; conservation, 103-6, 105n36, 110-11; origin beliefs, 104, 106-8, 110-11; ownership, 41, 49; source of pride to their owners, 29; terms for (in Kwoma), 32; terms for (in Tok Pisin), 32; uses ceremonially, 23-4, 31; uses non-ceremonially, 23, 31; women's access to, 28, 31-2; *see also* Minjawolar; Nggeyasatuk; Omunyaw; Wambon; Wayipanal
men's houses (non-Kwoma, Sepik region), 23-4, 27, 134, 225
Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), 35, 219
Meyimbambur clan (Bangwis village), 39, 85, 128, 226, 231-2, 235-7, 242-9; *see also* Kwoma social organisation, clans
Meyimbor (man, Bangwis village), 44, 81, 92, 129-30, 130n44, 131, 133-4, 136-7, 212-4, 216, 229, 270-1; biography, 213; portrait, 212
migration, 149; of Kwoma clans, 167
Mihalic, F., 9, 32, 52n16, 117n42
Miller, D., 68, 91
millipedes, 70, 148-9, 170-1,189; *see also* bark painting, subjects; myth; paintings on paper
Minja ceremony, 218, 229
Minjawolar men's house, 72, 183, 251
Moran, D., 113n40
Mowonjiya (spirit), 220-1
Moyichey (culture hero), 104, 107, 110; *see also* Wayipanal men's house, myth of origin
multilingualism, 75, 251

multivocality. *See* bark painting, multivocality of designs
Munn, N., 65, 67
Münzel, M., 35, 134n46
mural. *See* Ambunti Post Office mural
Museum of Modern Art (New York), 116
Museum of World Cultures (Frankfurt am Main), 7, 35, 134-5, 231
myth, Kwoma, 37, 39, 39n13, 41, 43-6, 48, 67, 96, 104, 106-8, 110, 117, 131-3,143, 149, 153, 163, 165, 219, 225, 237-41, 238n50, 238n51; moral lessons derived from, 110, 143, 147; of *bodi* fruit, 153; of conflict between parrots and humans, 147; of millipedes, 149; of origin of bridewealth payments, 153; of origin of Kwoma culture, 238-41; of origin of men's houses, 106-8, 110, 238-41; of woman named Tumbishikay, 131-3; ownership of, 39n13
myth, South Asian, 241n55
Nal (ceremony). *See* age-grade ceremonies
Naliwen (culture hero), 104, 107-8, 110; *see also* Wayipanal men's house, myth of origin
names. *See* Kwoma social organisation
Naniyas (man, Bangwis village), 52
Napu Lagoon, 24-5
National Art School (Papua New Guinea), 138, 141
National Cultural Property (Preservation) Act, Papua New Guinea, 105
National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne, Australia), 7, 9, 34, 46, 48, 78, 80, 95, 101, 118, 124, 128, 134, 137, 142, 144, 146, 148, 150, 152, 156, 160, 162, 165, 168, 170, 174, 176, 178, 180, 184, 186, 188, 190, 192, 194, 198, 200, 202, 204, 206, 208, 210, 214, 216, 220, 222, 224, 229, 229n48, 231n49, 232, 235-7, 242-9, 251n56, 252-7, 259-61, 263-4, 267-8, 270-6
Nawa ceremony, 229, 257
Nayikiya (man, Bangwis village), 85, 226, 229-49; biography, 231, 231n49; portrait, 230
net bags, 56, 147, 265
Newton, D., 219, 229
Nggeyasatuk men's house, 22, 26, 28-9, 50, 129, 183, 213, 251
Nggiley clan, 33, 39, 41, 47-9, 53, 99, 119-23, 126-7, 132-3, 164-6, 168, 170, 172, 174, 176-8, 180, 272-6; *see also* Wachongg
Nggiley totemic division, 39, 41, 49; *see also* Kwoma social organisation, totemic divisions
Nicolas, A., 205
non-figurative imagery. *See* bark painting style
Nowil clan, 39, 43, 47, 53, 84-5, 97, 99-101, 197-8, 200, 202, 204, 206, 208, 210, 213; *see also* Ambunyiki; Kwoma social organisation, clans
Nukuma art style, 25, 27, 75-6
Nukuma dialect group, 25, 75
Nukuma peoples, 25, 25n2, 27, 31n7, 75-6
Omunyaw men's house, 105, 234
orthography (used for Kwoma), 9
paint. *See* bark painting, materials used; pigments
painters (Kwoma). *See* Ambunyiki; Manal Kapay; Mburunggay; Meyimbor; Pandiiriikumb; Wachongg; Wakarap; Wulasaka; Yatiikapa
paintings on paper, 227-76
paintings on paper, subjects, *arokomaka* spirit, 232-3, 235; bat, 261, 267; *bodi* tree fruit, 244; centipede, 248; fish, 259; flying fox, 242, 244; insect, 255-6, 272; insect larvae, 273; Joseph's (Biblical) cloak, 276; *kamaka* tree flowers, 247; Nawa-mask design, 257; non-representational design, 249; parrot, 274; ripples on water, 243-4; scorpion, 246; shooting star, 236, 263; spider, 275; spiny fish, 245, 246; *wakatowa* design, 268; waterlily, 270, 271
Pandiiriikumb (man, Bangwis village), 119-23
Papua New Guinea, 23, 26n3, 27, 27n4, 34, 105, 115, 117, 138, 141

Papua New Guinea army, 197
Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery, 34, 45, 60, 66, 69, 81, 87, 92-4, 97, 105, 127-8, 131-2, 166
parrots, 147, 274; *see also* bark painting, subjects; myths; paintings on paper
Payip (man, Nggiley clan), 126, 165
perspective, 77, 80, 82
photographs, 7, 9, 82, 105n36, 128, 141
pigments (used in painting), 55-7, 60-3, 76, 221; terms for, 55-7; *see also* bark painting, materials used; paintings on paper
pigs, 41, 49, 163; in myth, 239-41
Plato, 106n37
Podro, M., 80, 82
polygyny, 153, 197
Polynesia, 116
Port Moresby, 138, 141, 227-8
Potter Collection, University of Melbourne (Australia), 231
pottery (Kwoma), 48, 56, 116-7, 161, 165, 265
Price, S., 115
pumpkin plant, 87; *see also* bark painting, subjects
pythons, 163; *see also* bark painting, subjects
Queensland Art Gallery (Australia), 34
rebus, 221
Reed, S., 26, 97, 103, 141, 213
Renaissance, 82, 113n40, 138
representation (in art), 78n25; two modes of, 79-82; *see also* art styles; bark painting style; resemblance
resemblance (in visual imagery), 37, 42, 78, 78n25
ritual sculptures, 128
rituals (Kwoma), 23, 31n7, 128; *see also* age-grade rituals; Minja; Nawa; Nokwi; Yena
river peoples. *See* Sepik River peoples
Roberts, C., 75n23, 88n29
Rodd, T., 51
Rodin, A., 113, 115
Rodseth, L., 73n22
Rowse, T., 92n30
Ruddle, K., 51
Rutgers, A., 147
Ryan, P., 259
Sackett, J., 75-7
sacrifice, 167
sago palm, 25n1, 41, 43, 51n15, 51-3, 55-6, 70, 175, 247; *see also* foods; bark painting, materials used
sago-stealing spirits, 90, 98, 100-1, 194-5
Schapiro, M., 75
Schebeck, B., 7
Schefold, R., 73n21
Schindlbeck, M., 23, 33, 47, 134n46
Schmitz, C., 73n21, 77
Schuster, M., 33, 35, 73n21, 101, 105n36, 231
scorpions, 156-7, 246; *see also* bark painting, subjects; paintings on paper
sculptors, 7, 106, 111-12, 115, 126, 141, 183, 231, 250-1
sculpture, 24, 29, 36, 55, 73, 104-5, 111, 114-15, 127, 130-1, 133, 227, 234, 239; *see also* Yena ceremony; bark painting, subjects
seasons, 193, 217
Second World War, 26, 35, 46, 125-6, 141, 161, 165, 193
self-decoration: 147, 231; men's, 47, 149, 164; women's, 46-7, 266*; see also* Korowenja; Kwoma culture; shell ornaments; women (Kwoma)
sensory modes, 119n43
Sepik River, 25, 44, 100-1, 192-3, 201, 242
Sepik River art (non-Kwoma), 23, 73, 76, 161, 205; *see also* Abelam art; Kambot art; Iatmul art
Sepik River peoples, 24-5, 25n1, 164, 193, 217, 264
Sepik River region, 23-5, 155, 193
Seventh Day Adventist church, 48, 276
Sewell, B., 113
Shakespeare, W., 95n32
shell ornaments, 149, 164, 264, 266
shell valuables, 119, 153, 238, 238n52, 164, 231, 264-5

shells, 60n20, 164, 251, 264, 266
shields, 23, 67, 205, 268-9
shooting stars, 43-4, 70, 94-9, 178-9, 236, 238, 260, 263; *see also* bark painting, subjects; paintings on paper
signatures (on works of art), 113n40, 137-8; *see also* bark painting, changes in
Silver, H., 75n23
skull racks (Iatmul), 7, 27, 133-5, 134n46, 205; *see also* Iatmul art
skulls, human, 179, 205
skulls, overmodelled, 134-5
slit-gongs, 37, 103, 105, 108, 151, 153, 233-4
Smith, B., 113n40
snails, 154-5; *see also* bark painting, subjects
songs, 7, 106-7, 117, 119, 132, 147, 165, 189, 231, 241
sorcery, 26, 41
souls (human) 43, 94-5, 98-9, 107-8, 110, 179, 236; *see also* bark painting, subjects; Kwoma culture, death beliefs
spiders, 41, 48, 70, 275; *see also* bark painting, subjects; paintings on paper
spirit world (Kwoma), 43, 45, 94, 104, 106-8, 110, 132, 149, 167, 179, 224-5, 236
spirits (Kwoma), 32, 37, 44-6, 66, 90, 104, 106-8, 110, 151, 162, 166-7, 178-9, 184-5, 194-5, 220-1, 224-5, 232-5; cannibal spirits, 224-5; punish disrespectful behaviour, 167, 185, 221; sacrifices to, 167; transformative powers, 221; *see also* bark painting, subjects; sago-stealing spirits; spirit world
Stanford University, 141
Stanlaw, J., 58
stone mortars (prehistoric), 45-6
style (in art). *See* art styles; bark painting style
subjects of bark paintings. *See* bark painting, subjects; paintings on paper
supernatural beings. *See* spirits
Sutton, P., 66, 82n27
Swadling, P., 23, 27
swimming. *See* Kwoma culture
symbolism. *See* bark painting, multivocality of designs; representation; warrior insignia
symmetry, 82-9; *see also* bark painting style
taro plant, 49, 83, 214-15; *see also* bark painting, subjects
teaching painting. *See* bark painting, teaching
Tek totemic division, 39, 39n12, 41-3, 49, 80-1, 84-5, 96, 126, 148, 152, 156, 158, 162, 165, 168, 170, 172, 174, 176-7, 186, 188, 190, 202, 204, 206, 210, 222; *see also* Kwoma social organisation, totemic divisions
Thomas, N., 113n40, 227n47
Tok Pisin (New Guinea Pidgin English), 9, 32, 32n8, 37n10, 52, 52n16, 56, 73, 117, 117n42, 125, 245; terms for 'art' objects, 117; term for non-representational designs, 249
Tokonggwiyisheembi tribe, 27; *see also* Tongwinjamb village
Tongwinjamb village, 27, 27n4, 35
Torembi village, 134-5
totemic divisions, 37, 39, 39n13, 41-3, 48-9; *see also* Hamikwa; Keyava; Nggiley; Tek; Wanyi; Wurambanj
totemism, 37, 37n10, 39, 39n13, 41-6, 48-9, 55, 59, 70, 87, 97, 100-1, 104, 107, 111, 130, 137, 143, 151, 165, 167, 169, 202, 211, 217; *see also* bark painting, subjects; paintings on paper; totemic divisions
tourism, 23, 31, 34n9, 117, 229
trade, 34n9, 129, 155, 161, 164, 193, 264
tribe. See Kwoma social organisation
Tuckson, M., 161
Tumbishikay (woman, in myth), 46, 131-4
Turner, V., 67
Tuwundimi (man, Bangwis village), 53
underworld. *See* spirit world
Urambanj village, 27; *see also* Wurambanj tribe
Vasari, G., 113n40

Vi (man, Brugnowi village), 269
Village Directory, 27n4
villages, 9, 23-7, 27n4, 39, 48-9, 75; names, 39n11; populations, 27; spelling of village names, 27n4, 75n23; *see also* Kwoma social organisation
Wachongg (man, Bangwis village), 7, 33, 47, 53-4, 57-62, 99, 120, 125-8, 131-3, 164-81, 272-6; biography, 164; portrait, 164
Wakarap (man, Bangwis village), 96-7, 99
Walbiri, 67
Wale (woman, in myth), 107
Walkling, Les, 7
Wambon men's house, 46; myth of origin, 238-41; *see also* men's houses (Kwoma)
Wantan (man, in myth), 149
Wanyi totemic division, 39, 41, 49, 96, 154
warfare (intertribal), 24, 26-7, 97, 103, 126, 134, 149, 161, 193, 221, 225, 239, 262, 264, 268; symbols of, 262
warrior insignia, 97-8, 149, 221
Washburn, D., 39, 75n23, 82-3, 86-7
Washkuk Hills, 23-25, 25n2, 26, 42-3, 45, 51, 55-6, 62, 66, 75-6, 85, 92, 95, 130-1, 134, 143, 147, 149, 153, 155, 159, 161, 163, 166-7, 169, 179, 185, 189, 193, 199, 211, 213, 217, 221, 224, 236, 242, 251
Washkuk village, 24, 25, 39, 47, 49, 238, 240
wasps, 104, 109, 256; *see also* paintings on paper
waterlily plant, 45, 70, 122, 132, 154-5, 216-7, 229, 270-1; *see also* bark painting, subjects; paintings on paper
waves (on rivers and lagoons), 43-4, 100-1, 192-3, 200-1; *see also* bark painting, subjects
Wayikola (man, Bangwis village), 262-4; biography, 262; portrait, 262
Wayipanal men's house, 29-34, 36, 38, 40, 64, 74, 83-5, 90, 96, 100-10, 114, 125-6, 129, 165, 183, 197, 213, 227, 231, 234, 251, 262; carved beams in, 129; myth of origin, 104, 106-10
wealth objects. *See* shell valuables
Whiting, J., 26, 46, 56n17, 97, 103, 141, 179, 193, 213, 239
Wierzbicka, A., 58n19
Wiessner, P., 75n23, 77
Witkowski, S., 58n19
Wollheim, R., 116
women (Iatmul), 266
women (Kwoma), 29, 47, 143; in myth, 153, 238-9; 238n51; response to mistreatment by men (in myth), 143; role in bark painting, 31; self-decoration, 46-7, 137; *see also* women (Iatmul); Kwoma social organisation, marriage practices
Wonyi'ow (man, Nggiley clan), 165
Woodfield, R., 78n25
Wulasaka (man, Bangwis village), 84-5, 98, 100-1
Wurambanj totemic division, 27, 39, 41, 49, 165, 198; *see also* Kwoma social organisation, totemic divisions
Wurambanj tribe, 27; *see also* Urambanj village
Wurm, S., 25n2
Yasiyan. See Yesan people
Yatiikapa (man, Bangwis village), 43, 46, 80-1, 93, 95-7, 112, 118, 119-23, 137-8, 140-63, 267-8; biography, 141; portrait, 140
Yau dialect group, 25, 76; *see also* Mayo language group
Yelogu village, 25, 85; *see also* Kaunga language group
Yena ceremony, 39n11, 127, 131, 196, 228
Yena ceremony figures, 127-8, 212, 240, 258
Yesan (= Yessan) Hills, 25, 75, 251
Yesan (= Yessan) people, 75n24, 75-6, 251
Yesan (= Yessan) village, 25, 75-6, 251; *see also* Mayo language group
Yesu (man, Bangwis village), 250

Creative Spirits

Bark Painting in the Washkuk Hills of North New Guinea

The art of painting on bark was once widely found in many parts of the Pacific, including the Sepik River region of Papua New Guinea, the home of the Kwoma people who are the subject of this study. The styles of the paintings and the subjects of designs were as varied as the hundreds of languages spoken in this region.

Following European contact at the end of the nineteenth century, and the social change this brought, many New Guinea peoples discontinued producing their vibrant designs on bark. But in some areas the art form still flourishes. This book gives a detailed account of the art of painting on bark among the Kwoma, a people speaking a distinct language who display their barks on the ceilings of their ceremonial men's houses. The book includes accounts of the work of a number of individual artists all of whom are represented by paintings in one or more major art museums internationally.

This second edition has a new chapter illustrating thirty-three large-format Kwoma paintings on paper commissioned by the author in the course of his fieldwork in the Sepik. All thirty-three works on paper, along with forty-two of the barks illustrated, now form part of the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (Australia). The book is a unique study of bark painting in a Papua New Guinea society and will have wide appeal to those interested in the art and ethnography of this region.

"This book is the product of an enviable depth of field research and scholarship and is a model for what others might do with their field observations of the material culture and art of New Guinea societies." Dr. Barry Craig, Oceania 2007, vol. 77.

"...Bowden's book is richly illustrated and provides a valuable resource on bark paintings. This strong focus on the object has resulted in a readable, well-photographed and approachable volume, which nevertheless is formidably focused on technical aspects of bark painting and the society in which it is made." Dr. Alex Golub, Museum Anthropology 2010, vol. 33.

"...this book constitutes an admirable and even comprehensive introduction to an Upper Sepik ritual bark painting tradition... It provides the reader with a remarkable experience of a rich and beautiful artistic tradition..." Dr. Phillip Guddemi, Pacific Arts 2011, vol. 11.

sidestonepress

ISBN: 978-94-6426-391-6